DISCOURSES

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

VOL. I.

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TWENTY DISCOURSES ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

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By WILLIAM CRAIG, D.D.
MINISTER OF ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, GLASGOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MDCCLXXV.

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of

of the garden? And the woman ſaid unto the ſerpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midſt of the garden, God hath ſaid, ye ſhall not eat of it, neither ſhall ye touch it, leſt ye die. And the ſerpent ſaid unto the woman, Ye ſhall not ſurely die; for God knoweth, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes ſhall be opened: and ye ſhall be as Gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman ſaw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleaſant to the eyes, and a tree to be deſired to make one wiſe, ſhe took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave alſo to her huſband with her, and he did eat. Page 108

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DIS-

DISCOURSE I.

The Importance of Religion to the Virtue and Happineſs of Private Life.

EPHES. ii. 12.

Without God in the World.

THE apoſtle, in the preceding context, endeavours to give the Epheſians a proper ſenſe of the importance of the chriſtian revelation, and of the obligations they were under to the divine mercy for bringing them to the knowledge of it. With this view he deſcribes their former ſituation, when they were idolaters; and their

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preſent ſituation, by the light and aſſiſtance of the goſpel. In the verſe which contains the ſubject of this diſcourſe, their ſituation while they were idolaters, is thus deſcribed by the apoſtle; "*At that time*, i. e. *when ye were gentiles in the fleſh, ye were without Chriſt, aliens from the commonwealth of Iſrael, and ſtrangers from the covenants of promiſe, having no hope, and without God in the world.* Each of theſe particulars tended to excite in them a becoming ſenſe of the miſerable condition from which they had eſcaped, and of their great obligations to the providence of God, who had brought them out of it. The laſt particular, comprehends in it all the evil and unhappy conſequences which are ſignified by the preceding parts of the deſcription, *They were without God in the world.*

In the following diſcourſe it is propoſed,

1ſt, To explain the character and ſituation of the perſons here marked by the apoſtle, as *without God in the world.*

2dly, To repreſent the unhappy conſequences that muſt neceſſarily proceed from this character and ſtate of mind.

I am, in the firſt place, to explain the character of the perſons here deſcribed; they are *without God in the world.* The original expreſſion is, they were atheiſts in the world, which, in the ſtrict meaning of it, ſignifies, that they denied the exiſtence and providence of God. That ſome of the Epheſians, to whom the apoſtle writes, had been in this ſtate of mind, before they were enlightened by the goſpel, is not improbable; and to this unhappy ſtate of mind they might have been ſeduced, by the ſenſeleſs ſuperſtitions which prevailed and were highly eſteemed by the Epheſians. Having no better mean of information about the nature and worſhip of the Deity, than the popular belief of their fellow-citizens and countrymen; and perceiving, at the ſame time, the abſurdity of this belief, they might, without

any further attention to the matter, have rejected every ſyſtem of religious belief, and in the ſtrict ſenſe of the expreſſion, become *atheiſts in the world.*

Nevertheleſs, the far greater part of the citizens of Epheſus were not, in this ſenſe, *atheiſts, or without God.* It ſufficiently appears, from the records of hiſtory, that they were idolaters, or worſhipers of falſe Gods, according to the theology which, at that time, obtained through the Roman empire. Moſt probably, therefore, the ſenſe of the apoſtle is, that the Epheſians, before they were enlightened by the goſpel, were without the knowledge of the true God; had no juſt conception of his nature and perfections; of the worſhip and obedience which he required, or of the way by which they were to obtain his favour: that, with reſpect to all the valuable purpoſes for which the knowledge and belief of his exiſtence is of conſequence to men, they were atheiſts, or *without God,*

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i. e. in the ſame dark and diſmal ſtate of mind, which thoſe were in who explicitly denied his exiſtence and providence.

From the above account of the ſtate of the Epheſians, it naturally follows, that every man, whether he be an idolater or a believer in the exiſtence of the one true God, is in the ſame ſtate of mind, as to all its conſequences on the virtue and happineſs of his life, if he lives in the neglect of that religious attention and regard which is due to the divine character and providence. Although by the influence of education, or of ſome other accident, he may believe, and acknowledge the exiſtence of the one true God, and entertain a juſt idea of his character; yet if he gives not his attention to this intereſting idea and belief; if he does not cultivate within himſelf thoſe devout affections towards him, which it ought, in reaſon, to awaken in the heart of man; if he draws not from it a becoming ſenſe of the import-

ance of thoſe moral obligations, by which he ought to regulate his life: he is, with reſpect to all the valuable purpoſes for which the knowledge of the true God and the belief of his exiſtence is to be deemed a matter of importance, in the ſame ſtate of mind, as if he believed there was no God.

That knowledge of the true God, without which the Epheſians had lived while they were idolaters, and to which they had been brought by the revelation of the goſpel, is in its nature fitted, and ought, in juſtice, to produce the moſt important influence upon the heart of man. It ought to lead him, in the firſt place, to thoſe acts of reverence, gratitude, confidence, and reſignation, of which the perfections of his nature, and the adminiſtration of his providence, are the natural and proper objects. It ought, from thence, to lead him to entertain a reverend regard to the laws of juſtice, charity,

rity, and mercy, of temperance and purity, as being the laws and ſtatutes of his moral kingdom, ſtamped with his authority. It ought, in fine, to fill him with the higheſt pleaſure and delight, when he reflects, that this vaſt univerſe and all its important intereſts are in the hand of God, and under the direction of his all-wiſe, all-loving providence.

Now, in this view, every irreligious man is *without God*. He may have a juſt idea of the nature and providence of God; but his idea of him is a lifeleſs and inſipid thing, void of all impreſſion or effect upon his character. He is not the wiſer, or the better, or the happier man, for what *he* knows of God. The diſpoſitions of his heart, and the meaſures of his life, his projects and purſuits, his hopes and fears, every thing, in ſhort, that enters into the idea of a human character, is unconnected with what he knows or believes concerning God, and is wholly undirected by its in-

fluence. Thus he is in the ſame ſtate of mind as if *he diſbelieved* the exiſtence of a Deity, or thought there was no God.

Before we proceed to repreſent the hurtful conſequences of this ſtate of mind, it may be proper to obſerve, that it is in itſelf, a criminal and immoral ſtate of mind, and ſuch as every man, on calm reflection, muſt condemn. The virtue and propriety of human conduct, principally lies in its being ſuited to the relations in which we ſtand to other beings with whom our nature or our ſituation hath connected us. The virtue of a parent lies in loving, protecting, and educating his children. The virtue of a child conſiſts in the exerciſe of gratitude, reverence, and ſubmiſſion to his parent. The virtue of a friend, is kindneſs and fidelity to the object of his friendſhip. In the ſame way, all the other ties and duties of a virtuous life might be explained. Now let any man calmly conſider with himſelf, if the ſame

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ſenſe of virtue and moral obligation, ſhould not lead him to attend to the great Creator of the world, and to cheriſh in himſelf thoſe pious affections and regards, which the belief of his character and providence is fitted to inſpire; or if he can enjoy the approbation of his own mind, whilſt he excludes this attention to his Maker, any more than if he ſhould exclude all attention and regard to his fellow-men. There is, indeed, in ſome reſpects, a ſtronger obligation to the firſt of theſe. The connexion which we have with God, and the relations in which we ſtand to him, are eſſential to our being, immutable and everlaſting; our connexions with our fellow-men, are occaſional, tranſient, and mutable. No man, therefore, upon calm reflection, can believe, that he may, with innocence, nay without a great degree of guilt, exclude the Creator of the world from his thoughts, and live *without God in the world.*

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In the ſtate of mind above deſcribed, it is not ſuppoſed, that a man is chargeable with any poſitive or deliberate expreſſions of impiety to God; but only that he lives in the neglect of that attention and regard which is due to him from his reaſonable creatures, and which the knowledge of his being and perfections ought, in reaſon, to awaken in their minds. It may be proper, therefore, more particularly to obſerve, the immorality and guilt which is contained in this omiſſion and neglect.

In many inſtances, the mere omiſſion of our duty, and the want of proper attention and regard is condemned by every one as highly criminal. This any man may eaſily perceive, who will reflect upon the manner in which we form a judgment of men's characters from their diſpoſition and behaviour, in the more intereſting connexions of human life. In theſe, it is not only poſitive expreſſions of injuſtice, ingratitude, or inhumanity, that we con-

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demn as odious and unnatural; but the want of ſenſibility, or of a tender and affectionate regard. The cold unfeeling heart which leaves a man wholly inattentive to thoſe kind and tender offices of life that are expected from him; the parent, who, though he ſhould commit no act of inhumanity or injuſtice to his child, yet feels no ſatisfaction in the happineſs and virtue of his child, no ſorrow at the ſight of his diſtreſs; the child, who, though he ſhould expreſs no criminal irreverence or diſobedience to a worthy parent, yet is deſtitute of all filial affection and regard; the friend, who is not warmly intereſted in the happineſs and honour of his friend; theſe, every man, who has any degree of ſenſibility himſelf, will unavoidably condemn as hateful and immoral characters. But, upon a calm attention to the ſubject, it will undoubtedly be found, that a voluntary inattention to the Creator of the world, and the total abſence of thoſe pious affections

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and regards, which the knowledge of his character and the obligations we are under to his goodneſs ſhould awaken in the heart of man, is a criminal and hateful immorality, that muſt be marked with infamy, when God ſhall render unto every one according to his works.

On this head of the diſcourſe, it may be proper likewiſe to obſerve, that the nobleſt of all ideas that can enter into the human thought, and the fineſt of all emotions that can ariſe in the heart of man, are excluded from the mind of HIM, *who lives without God.*

The idea of the Deity, ſuch as the genuine ſenſe of nature and the ſacred ſcriptures have preſented to our view, viz. as a Being poſſeſſed of infinite wiſdom, power, and goodneſs; the creator and preſerver of the univerſe; continually exerciſing the perfections of his nature, in the adminiſtration of his works, is undoubtedly the grandeſt, and, at the ſame time, the moſt

beautiful

beautiful idea that can be admitted into the human underſtanding. The devout affections of eſteem, admiration, and complacency, which this idea naturally excites, are undoubtedly the moſt excellent and amiable affections in the human heart; every way ſuited to the object which occaſions them, and, in the higheſt degree, improving and delightful to the man, by whom they are conceived; nay, this idea and theſe affections give the higheſt poſſible elevation to the mind of man, and raiſe the beſt faculties, with which his nature is endowed, to their nobleſt exerciſe. If, for inſtance, the human underſtanding is employed in a worthy manner, when exerted in the ſearch of what is great, beautiful, or uſeful, in the productions of human wiſdom, and in tracing out the curious and uſeful purpoſes for which they were contrived; is it not, in a ſtill worthier employment, when it is exerted in the ſearch and contemplation of the works of God,

and

and in tracing out the great and uſeful purpoſes for which they were contrived? If the heart of man is affected in a worthy and becoming manner, when it feels the admiration or delight which the contemplation of the works of human wiſdom gives; is it not affected in a ſtill more becoming manner, when it feels and cultivates the admiration and delight which ariſes from the contemplation of the works of God?

In all other ſubjects, a man of ſenſe and taſte diſcerns and feels the power of what is excellent and perfect, in its kind, and willingly reſigns himſelf to the influence of thoſe impreſſions which it makes upon him; whereas, to be inſenſible of excellence, or unaffected by the view of it, is always deemed the mark of invincible inattention or ſtupidity. What reaſon, then, can be aſſigned, why the mind of man ſhould be inattentive to the works of God, or unaffected by the view of them? Ought

not

not a ſenſe of what is great or beautiful, in other ſubjects, lead the man who is poſſeſſed of it, to the contemplation of the great and beautiful works of his Creator, and to lay his heart open to thoſe religious impreſſions they are fitted to produce? But the man who is *without God*, excludes this ſublime contemplation from his thoughts, and all thoſe amiable ſentiments, which it is adapted to awaken in the heart of man. In the language of the Pſalmiſt *, *He ſeeks not after God; God is not in all his thoughts.*

Having explained the character and ſtate of mind denoted by the expreſſion of the apoſtle in the text; we are next to conſider its hurtful influence on the Virtue and Happineſs of human Life; and, of conſequence, the oppoſite importance of piety to God, or of a devout attention to his character and providence.

* Pſalms x. 4.

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In the firſt place, let us take a view of the influence that a man's being *without God*, in the manner above deſcribed, muſt have upon his virtue and integrity. Here it will be obvious, that in this ſtate of mind, a man excludes from his attention and regard, the ſtrongeſt motive to, and ſupport of his integrity. The moral perfections of the Deity, ſuch as truth and juſtice, goodneſs, mercy, and forgiveneſs, are the great models of every thing that is virtuous and worthy in a human character; and the contemplation of HIM, as the righteous Governor of the world, gives a peculiar authority to that ſenſe of moral obligation, which was originally planted in the mind of man. By a devout attention, therefore, to the being, perfections, and government of God, we ſhall give ſtability and ſtrength to every principle of virtue in the heart.

Independent of religion, moral virtue may appear to be a lovely form, which beautifies

beautifies the human character, and gives the virtuous man the beſt idea and enjoyment of himſelf: but it cannot poſſibly have ſuch a commanding influence upon his conduct, as, when joined to this idea, it becomes the object of his contemplation, conſidered as the image of the great and good Creator of the world, as the ſtatute of his moral kingdom; as that which beautifies the human character in his eſteem, and procures the bleſſings of his friendſhip. This view of it evidently gives an authority and dignity to the rules of virtue and our ſenſe of moral obligation, which cannot be conceived by the man who excludes the Deity from his attention and regard.

It muſt, indeed, be owned, that by *that* ſenſe of juſtice and humanity, which was originally planted in our nature by the hand of God, a man may act a juſt, a generous, and a worthy part, in many inſtances. But a ſtedfaſt and impartial

virtue through the whole of life, more eſpecially in circumſtances of ſtrong temptation and difficulty, is ſcarcely to be expected from the man who derives no aſſiſtance from the principle of piety to God. We may, at leaſt, affirm, in the ſtrongeſt terms, that a ſenſe of moral obligation, in its full authority and in the whole of its extent, cannot be ſo eaſily preſerved, nor ſo eaſily ſubmitted to, as the ſupreme law of human life, by which the virtuous man is bound to limit and control every interfering intereſt; as when he regards it, not only as the moſt amiable ſentiment and dictate of his nature, to which he ought to pay a due regard, in order to do juſtice to himſelf; but likewiſe the dictate and law of his Creator, to which he ought to pay the moſt profound and unreſerved obedience, as the ſubject of his moral kingdom.

On this account, our Saviour called the love of God, the firſt and the great commandment

mandment of the *law*. It is the *firſt* commandment in the law of God, as, in the order of nature, it is prior to all other moral obligations. It is the *great* commandment of his law, as it has a leading influence on all the other duties of a virtuous life. On the ſame account, it is probable, he placed the merit of his own life in doing the will of God; and recommended this to the attention of his friends, as the ſum and perfection of their duty; on a juſt view of the nature and will of God, this rule includes in it a regard to the whole extent of moral virtue, and muſt lead the man by whom it is obſerved, to every thing that is virtuous and laudable in human conduct. Thus it may appear that the principle of piety to God, is of the higheſt importance to the virtue and integrity of human life, and that when this principle is excluded from the mind of man, moral virtue muſt immediately loſe its chief protection and ſupport.

Let us, in the next place, take a view of the importance of this principle to the comfort and happineſs of life. Here one might open a field of obſervation that would ſet the importance of religion in a very ſtrong light. Every object upon earth, from which the happineſs of life can be ſuppoſed to be derived, muſt be ſeen by the religious man, and the man who lives *without God*, in a very different light; and the happineſs of their lives muſt be affected in a very different manner, by thoſe different points of light in which they are beheld.

We ſhall briefly ſtate the compariſon in a few particulars and conſider the different and oppoſite views they muſt be led to entertain; 1ſt, of the world in which they live; 2dly, of their own exiſtence and condition in the world; 3dly, of their connexion with their fellow men; and laſtly, of futurity.

1ſt, How

1ſt, How different and oppoſite muſt their conceptions be of the world in which they live! The fool who thinks, or ſays, there is no God, formally rejects all ideas of deſign, of wiſdom, and benignity in the conſtitution of the univerſe. The man who is *without God*, in the manner formerly explained, equally excludes the influence of theſe ideas on the happineſs and comfort of his life; and from what ſources of enjoyment he thus deprives himſelf, it is not difficult to underſtand. The works of men, in which diſtinguiſhed marks of genius and wiſdom have appeared, have, in all ages of the world, given the higheſt entertainment to thoſe who were capable of underſtanding them; and, in proportion to their capacity and taſte, have given them a proportionable pleaſure. No man ſurely will affirm, that the diſplays of divine wiſdom, goodneſs, and benignity, in the ſtructure and adminiſtration of the univerſe, are not fitted to give equal or ſuperior entertainment; or

that admiration and eſteem, confidence and gratitude, excited by a due attention to the works of God, are leſs joyful or agreeable emotions in the heart, than when they are excited by the works of men. Now, of all thoſe peculiar pleaſures which ariſe from the contemplation of the works of God, and of all thoſe joyful emotions they are fitted to awaken in the heart, he who lives *without God* totally deprives himſelf. The world in which he lives, all the great and beautiful works of the Creator which he ſees around him, and the exhibitions of his wiſdom and goodneſs there, in his idea of them, muſt appear in the ſame light, in which they appear to *him* who thinks there is no *God*, and in no other way contribute to his happineſs, than as they are ſubſervient to the ſupport and enjoyments of his animal and mortal life.

2dly, Let us, in the ſecond place, conſider the different lights in which the religious man, and the man who is *without God*,

God, muſt ſee their own exiſtence and condition in this world, and what enjoyment, under theſe different views, they are capable of deriving from themſelves. The fool who ſays in his heart, there is no God, muſt in conſequence of this conception, entertain a very mean conception of himſelf; as a being ſprung from nothing, that has lately ſtarted into life, he knows not whence or how; that has no better origin or deſtiny, than the cattle of the field, or the meaneſt reptile upon earth. But the man who is *without God*, as to all the purpoſes of ſelf-enjoyment, muſt have the ſame contemptible idea of himſelf. His taſte of life, his projects and purſuits, and the whole of his enjoyments, muſt proceed upon the ſame conception of himſelf, which he would entertain if he thought there was no God. The idea of his own exiſtence, ſuggeſted by religion, as the creature of an infinitely wiſe and benevolent Creator, and as created for the contemplation, the

reſemblance and enjoyment of the author of his being, with all thoſe delightful ſentiments and proſpects which this idea opens to the mind of man, are totally excluded from his thoughts. When he falls into affliction he is deſtitute of all reſource, for he knows of no ſuperior wiſdom, power, or goodneſs, in which he can repoſe his confidence and hope. He muſt aſcribe the affliction which he ſuffers, to the accidental and capricious conſtitution of the univerſe in which he lives, or to the weakneſs of that nature which accident has given him, or to the capriciouſneſs and malice of his fellow men (reflections which may exaſperate, but cannot alleviate the afflictions of his life); or, without attempting to account for their origin and cauſe, he muſt remain incapable of every rational ſupport or conſolation under them.

3dly, Conſider, thirdly, the different and oppoſite lights, in which the devout man and the man who is *without God* muſt ſee their

their fellow-men, and what enjoyment they are capable of deriving from their friendſhip and ſociety. To him who is *without God*, the whole human race muſt appear in the ſame light in which he ſees himſelf. In his view, they are a ſet of beings, that by accident, or he knows not how, have come into exiſtence, and who are again to ſink to nothing, by the ſame inexplicable accident. If men are not conſidered in the light of their connexion with and dependance upon God, as their common parent and creator; every human being ſhrinks into its own exiſtence, as a ſolitary individual; and ſuch connexions as it has with its fellow-men become extremely inſignificant. On this diſmal idea of the human race, as having no joint connexion with, or dependance on the almighty and benevolent Creator of the world; the amiable and endearing tyes between parents and their children, between brothers, friends,—with all our other ſweet connexions in ſociety,

are

are little more than tranſient, popular conceits. The ties of conſcience, the pleadings of compaſſion, the dictates of integrity, gratitude, and friendſhip, are but the accidental weakneſſes of nature, which every man may gratify or contradict, as his intereſt or pleaſure ſhall happen to direct. It is the view of mankind as the offſpring of one great and benevolent parent, as fellow-members in the ſame great family of God, all depending on his parental care, that gives the ties of nature and humanity their full command and power upon the heart of man, and renders them the fountains of unſpeakable delight.

From what has been obſerved on this head of the diſcourſe, the importance of religion to the happineſs of life appears in a very ſtrong light. The religious man conſiders his connexion with ſociety and his fellow-men as the ſtation aſſigned him in this world by his Maker, wherein he hath appointed him to act the virtuous and worthy

worthy part, as a child and member of his family; and after he hath done his part, to riſe to ſome ſublimer ſtate of uſefulneſs and happineſs in the kingdom of his Father: whilſt the man who is *without God* has no other view of his connection with his fellow-men, than as an accident in the ſtate of his exiſtence, of which he can give no account, and which connexion, by a like inexplicable accident, is ſoon to be diſſolved: nor can he form any other idea of his buſineſs in ſociety, than to proſecute the tranſitory ſchemes of ambition, avarice, or pleaſure; and after he has run the uſual round in theſe, to be ſeparated for ever from his fellow-men, and from all the moſt endearing ties of human friendſhip: This leads us to conſider in the laſt place,

4thly, The different proſpects of futurity which are opened to the religious man, and the man who is *without God*. The apoſtle, in the ſame verſe which contains the

the ſubject of this diſcourſe, deſcribes the ſituation of the laſt of theſe in the following words, *He has no hope.* He can have no other proſpect of futurity than, that when he leaves the world, he ſhall either ceaſe to be, or that he ſhall be miſerable. With whatever uncertainty the doctrine of a future ſtate may be ſuppoſed to be accompanied, yet no man ever thought that, in caſe of its reality, the perſon who neglects, or deſpiſes his Creator, is there to be rewarded by him. The utmoſt height to which his ſelf-flattering expectations can ariſe is, that when he has gone through the buſineſs and pleaſures of this preſent life, he is then to ſink to nothing, and loſe all reflection and conſciouſneſs for ever. He muſt either explicitly and formally maintain this melancholy proſpect, or at leaſt remain incapable of the happineſs and comfort which proceeds from any other proſpect of futurity. Thus, *He has no hope.*

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On the other hand, the religious man is animated and delighted in his progreſs by the hope of immortality. He conſiders the ſtate of his exiſtence in this world as the infancy or childhood of his being, from whence he is to riſe to the nobler occupations and enjoyments of a *perfect* man. Thoſe ſacred and divine pleaſures which he draws from the contemplation of the works of God; from the exerciſe and cultivation of devout affections towards him; from the friendſhip and ſociety of virtuous men, and from the conſciouſneſs of having acted an upright and worthy part in his progreſs through this life; theſe, he hopes, ſhall be preſerved, extended, and enlarged, in the future and eternal world; and in them he hopes to ſpend a bleſſed immortality.

Theſe now are the different proſpects of futurity, which are opened to the religious man, and to the man who is *without God:* and what a mighty difference,

in

in point of happineſs and ſatisfaction, theſe different and oppoſite proſpects muſt create, needs no illuſtration: it muſt be evident to every one.

From the reflections which have been ſuggeſted in the preceding part of this diſcourſe, we may naturally deduce the following remark; That in an age when men are ſo inquiſitive and curious in their ſearches after what may add to the improvement and happineſs of human life, it is, in ſome degree, ſurpriſing that ſo little attention is beſtowed on thoſe improvements which may be drawn from piety to God. By this principle, the grandeſt and moſt amiable ideas that can enter into human thought, are preſented to the mind of man, the fineſt moral feelings and affections are excited in his heart, and the nobleſt reſources under the calamities of life are opened to his view. Amidſt, therefore, all thoſe refinements in pleaſure, and the various arts of adding

to the happineſs of life, which are ſo much ſtudied in the preſent age; it will be found, upon attention, to be a capital defect, that the improvements and pleaſures which proceed from religion are left out of the account. For the ſame reaſon it may be juſtly thought a capital defect, that the taſte for what is grand or beautiful in the fine arts, is not improved into a taſte for thoſe grand and beautiful ideas which are ſuggeſted by religion. Men readily acknowledge the impreſſions which are made upon them by the ſight of what is great or beautiful in other ſubjects. Admiration and eſteem, gratitude, complacency, confidence, and the like emotions, are indulged and readily acknowledged, when their proper objects are preſented to their view; nay, men would be aſhamed of being found unaffected by the view of them. But upon the view of thoſe great and amiable ideas which are ſet before them in the doctrines of religion, they ſtudy to remain

unaffected

unaffected and inſenſible, nay ſeem to pride themſelves in this inſenſibility. What may be the cauſe of this apparent inconſiſtency? Is it that the knowledge of religion, and the improvements which it gives the mind of man, may be acquired by the whole human ſpecies, and are within the reach of every man.—But are not the moſt valuable gifts of God beſtowed in common upon the whole human race, or put within the reach of every man? and does a wiſe man think the leſs of them on that account?—Or is it that religion is debaſed by ignorant and vulgar minds, and frequently appears in the form of ſuperſtition, enthuſiaſm, or hypocriſy? —But are not the moſt excellent improvements in human life liable to the worſt corruption and abuſe? and is it not the province of taſte and true diſcernment to diſtinguiſh what is natural and genuine, in every ſubject, from that which is unnatural and ſpurious; but the mark of ignorance,

norance, and want of true diſcernment, to deſpiſe what is excellent, becauſe it has been disfigured by ignorance and folly?

We may therefore venture to affirm, that when men ſhall come to have a thorough knowledge of themſelves and of the faculties with which they are endowed, and ſhall have improved their taſte for what is grand and beautiful to its full extent, religion will ſtand firſt in their eſteem; and that it is owing to narrowneſs of thought, or the groſſeſt inattention, that the improvements and pleaſures which ariſe from true religion are neglected or deſpiſed.

Upon the whole of what has been ſuggeſted in this diſcourſe, it is melancholy to obſerve, that ſome perſons of the beſt underſtanding, and of amiable manners, are entirely deſtitute of that piety to God, which, if duly cultivated in their hearts, would complete the goodneſs of their cha-

racter in his eſteem; and for which too, they are fitted in the fineſt manner, by the faculties which he has given them.—— 'Tis mournful to obſerve, that whilſt ſuch perſons are poſſeſſed of the principles of honour, friendſhip, and humanity, and are living in the conviction of their own uſefulneſs and merit in ſociety, they are nevertheleſs ſadly inattentive to the hurt that is done to their fellow-men, by the example of impiety which they ſet before them, and which the goodneſs and humanity they diſcover in other parts of their deportment ſhould lead them to avoid.— It is likewiſe mournful to obſerve, that whilſt ſuch perſons are happily prepared for the reception of every ſocial and moral pleaſure, they are nevertheleſs total ſtrangers to thoſe divine pleaſures which proceed from a devout attention to the character and providence of God; and whereof, by the principles and diſpoſitions

of

of their nature, they are equally ſuſceptible.——It is yet more mournful to reflect, that perſons of this character totally diſqualify themſelves for that *fullneſs of joy which is before the face of God for ever:* like the young man beloved by the ſaviour of the world, on account of the probity and goodneſs of his manners; who, nevertheleſs, departed from his ſaviour, and for ever loſt his friendſhip, becauſe one thing was wanting to complete his character.——It is mournfulleſt of all to think, (and yet the thought is unavoidable) that thoſe ſame excellent endowments which perſons of this character poſſeſs, inſtead of adding to their future happineſs, muſt, by a ſad reverſe, become the ſource of future miſery. The aſſertion may be ſtrong, but it will appear, on calm reflection, to be juſt, that the better a man's underſtanding is, and the finer his perceptions are in the ſocial and moral ties of life, he muſt feel ſo much the more

ſenſible remorſe, when the whole of his moral and religious obligations come to be unveiled before him; and when, by this means, he ſhall come to ſee, in its full light, the injuſtice and impiety of that neglect with which he has treated the Creator of the world, and, in a manner, expelled him from his own creation.

DISCOURSE II.

The Importance of Religion to the Welfare of Society.

2 CHRON. XV. 2.

The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye ſeek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forſake him, he will forſake you.

THIS ſolemn admonition was given to the nation of the Jews, by the prophet Azariah, under the immediate direction of the ſpirit of God. It was intended to point out to them, the oppoſite

effects of their adhering to the worſhip and ſervice of the one true God, or of their departing from it, unto the idolatry and wickedneſs of the Gentile nations. *The Lord is with you while ye be with him.*— To be with God, is to preſerve in our minds a reverend impreſſion of his exiſtence, perfections, and government of the world: the conſequence of this will be, *The Lord will be with us*, i. e. he will be our protector and friend, intereſted in our welfare and proſperity. If *ye ſeek him, he will be found of you.* To ſeek him is to implore, and depend upon his favour, and to employ every method in our power in order to obtain it. If we thus ſeek him, he *will be found* of us, *i. e.* he will grant us the deſire of our hearts, and beſtow the marks of his regard. But if we forſake him, by excluding him from our attention, and by a neglect of the ſacred inſtitutions of his ſervice, he will forſake us, by withdrawing his protection from us.

This

This ſolemn admonition given to the nation of the Jews, naturally leads us to conſider what connexion is to be found between the prevalence of piety to God in the temper and manners of a nation, and its public welfare and proſperity.

There was, we all know, a peculiar and marvellous connexion between theſe two, in the ſtate of the Jewiſh nation. God governed them, and directed their national concerns in a manner not experienced by any other nation. By ſigna and miraculous interpoſitions of his providence, he raiſed them to proſperity, or ſunk them into national calamities, in proportion as they adhered to the worſhip of himſelf, and obſerved thoſe religious inſtitutions of his ſervice, which he had preſcribed; or departed from them, into the idolatry and cuſtoms of the Gentile nations. This was the peculiar ſituation of the Jews, not indeed experienced by any other nation upon earth. There is

however ſtill to be obſerved, though in a different way, a ſtrong connexion between the prevalence of piety to God, in the ſentiments and manners of a nation, and its national proſperity: a connexion, which is founded on the original eſtabliſhment of Providence, and which may be traced, from the effects which this religious principle, by its native tendency, is fitted to produce. This is the ſubject I have propoſed to illuſtrate in the following diſcourſe.

That the probity and virtue of a nation is the principal cauſe and ſupport of its proſperity, and that the prevalence of immorality tends to its deſtruction, is, I believe, generally acknowledged; and the juſtice of this acknowledgment is ſufficiently confirmed by the hiſtory of the world. But, on due attention to the ſubject, we ſhall find that the only principle which is able to preſerve the virtue of a people in its proper influence, and to its

full

full extent, is the principle of piety to God, and a firm perſuaſion of their being anſwerable to him, for their conduct. This, alſo, is ſufficiently confirmed from the hiſtory and experience of the world. Sobriety, induſtry, and honeſty, without which no nation upon earth can be in ſafety or proſperity, have prevailed, and been held in public honour and reſpect, in thoſe nations only, where religion was regarded and eſteemed. When this was neglected and deſpiſed, there immediately enſued an univerſal corruption and depravity of manners. One of the moſt obſerving of the Roman * hiſtorians, in a graphical deſcription which he gives of the decline of the grandeur and proſperity of the Roman people, attributes this decline to the corruption of their manners, and marks it as a principal circumſtance in the national corruption, that the Romans had then learned to neglect the

* Salluſt.

gods,

gods, and, in conſequence of this, to make a ſacrifice of every public intereſt to their private avarice and ambition.

In order to perceive, more preciſely, the importance of religion to public virtue and proſperity, it ought to be conſidered, that the common people, who make the greateſt part, and indeed the ſtrength of every nation, will feel no ſufficient obligation to a virtuous and honeſt conduct, if a ſenſe of providence, and the principle of piety to God, is excluded from their minds. Intemperance and riot, falſehood and diſhoneſty, perfidiouſneſs and perjury, which evidently tend to the deſtruction of ſociety, will immediately prevail, if a ſenſe of God and providence is totally excluded from their hearts. Some few of higher education and refinement may imagine they have inducements of a more delicate and finer nature, to a virtuous and honourable conduct: and it would be happy for ſociety, if theſe inducements were

were as powerful and extenſive as perſons of this character ſeem to think them. But whatever may be the caſe with men of higher education and refinement, yet the greateſt part of mankind would undoubtedly feel no ſufficient ſenſe of moral obligation, were a ſenſe of God and the ties of religion to be entirely extinguiſhed in their minds; and the reaſon of it may be eaſily perceived. The far greater part of mankind are obliged from their earlier years, to be employed in the ſervile and laborious offices of life, with very little leiſure or ability to cultivate the higher faculties which God has given them, or to attain thoſe finer and more delicate perceptions of moral obligation which may be acquired by proper culture and reflection. On this account nothing will be ſufficient to give them a commanding and complete idea of their moral obligations, but a ſenſe of the authority of God as enacting and ſupporting them, and of their being accountable

countable to him, for their obſervation or neglect of them.

In ſome capital and ſtriking inſtances, the difference between right and wrong, and a ſenſe of moral obligation, may be be felt by every man. There are inſtances of truth and falſehood, of juſtice and injuſtice, of humanity and cruelty, that will ſtrike the conſcience, and affect the moral ſenſe of every man who is not totally depraved. But in many other inſtances, where the obligation is of a more delicate, though of a very important nature, it will be found extremely difficult, if not impracticable, to give the bulk of men a full conviction of their duty, without recurring to the expreſs authority and law of God. Of this kind are many inſtances of candour and integrity, gratitude and friendſhip, meekneſs and forgiveneſs, which are of great importance to the welfare of ſociety.

It

It will be found ſtill more difficult, after they are brought from the ſenſe of nature, to perceive their duty and their moral obligation, to give them ſuch a ſenſe of its authority as is requiſite to influence their conduct, in ſituations where their duty happens to ſtand in competition with their intereſts or paſſions.

In general, it will be found, that virtue, how amiable ſoever it may appear to the mind of man, is deprived of its principal ſecurity and ſtrength, when it is not enforced by the command of God and the ſanctions of his moral government; and that the only principle on which the bulk of men can be engaged to pay a ſuitable regard to their moral obligations, in the whole of their extent, and in every circumſtance of life, is a religious reverence for their Creator, conſidered by them, as their governor and judge, by whom the laws of virtue were enacted and preſcribed, and by whom men's future happineſs or miſery

miſery hath been connected with their obedience or diſobedience to the laws which he has given them. In this view, the fear of God is, with great propriety, called in ſcripture *the beginning of wiſdom*, and the whole of our duty is deſcribed, as conſiſting in obedience to the laws of God. From the few remarks that have been made, it may appear to be a thing of high importance to the welfare of ſociety, that a ſenſe of God and a principle of religion be preſerved in the minds of men; that, therefore, it is incumbent on every man, not only for his own intereſt, but as a uſeful member of ſociety and a lover of his country, to be the friend and encourager of true religion, and as far as he is able, to bring it into public honour and eſteem. This, in a particular manner, is incumbent upon thoſe whoſe example or authority has the moſt extenſive influence.

Such as are diſtinguiſhed by their birth, their education, or fortune, uſually affect a

laudable ambition to be thought the benefactors of their country, and encouragers of what contributes to its improvement or welfare. What degree of uſefulneſs or merit in ſociety this principle may produce, it is not our preſent purpoſe to inquire. But this we may affirm, in the ſtrongeſt manner, that ſuch perſons would become much more uſeful and deſerving members of ſociety, and would much more extenſively promote the welfare of their country, did they add to the other virtues of their character a devout reverence for God, and ſet to their inferiors the example of a rational and uſeful piety: in other words, did they encourage, by their own example and authority, that principle, which only is able to ſuggeſt a ſufficient motive to a virtuous and uſeful conduct amongſt the bulk of men. We may even venture to affirm, that ſome of thoſe, in the higher ranks of life, who poſſibly may pride themſelves in the honour, humanity, and

uſefulneſs

uſefulneſs of their conduct, are (without obſerving it) doing much injury and miſchief to ſociety, by giving an example of that impiety and diſregard of the Creator of the world, which, among the greater part of mankind, is connected with other immoralities, of the moſt pernicious influence on the welfare of ſociety.

I know it is objected to the religion of the common people, that it has but little influence upon their moral conduct, or the practice of thoſe virtues which are of chief importance to ſociety; that it is uſually placed in the belief of ſome abſtruſe myſterious points of doctrine, in the obſervation of ſome ſuperſtitious forms of worſhip, which have little or no connexion with their moral conduct: and it is to be confeſſed and exceedingly lamented, that there is often too much ground for this remark. At the ſame time, however, the following obſervations deſerve to be attended to.

1. Firſt,

1. First, That the religion of the common people, though it ſhould be mixed with a degree of uſeleſs myſtery and ſuperſtition, is nevertheleſs of great advantage to their morals; and that the man who lives in the fear of God with any tolerable meaſure of ſincerity, is likely to be a better, and uſefuller member of ſociety, than he who is totally undirected by this principle. I believe it will be ſeldom found, that a ſenſe of religion, even among the loweſt and moſt ignorant of the people, does not preſerve them from thoſe vices at leaſt, which are of the moſt pernicious tendency, and engage them to many laudable and uſeful actions which they would not have otherwiſe performed. Let any man look into the ſtate of thoſe families amongſt the common people, where a regard for religion and the worſhip of God prevails, though blended with ignorance and ſuperſtition; and compare it with the ſtate of ſuch families as are void

of this regard, and he will perceive ſuch a difference in their manners, and in their domeſtic happineſs and peace, as will undoubtedly convince him of the truth of what is now affirmed.

Further, let any man calmly put the queſtion, whether he thinks the generality of the common people would become the better or worſe members of ſociety, if, notwithſtanding all the uſeleſs and ſometimes hurtful ſuperſtitions which are mixed with their religion, they were to loſe all ſenſe of God, of Providence, and a future judgment, and to give up with every form of religious worſhip and devotion.

2. Secondly, Let it be conſidered *who* are chiefly to be blamed for thoſe extremes of ſuperſtition and formality which are complained of in the religion of the populace. The error is not owing ſolely to their own ignorance and weakneſs, or to the ignorance and weakneſs of their teachers,

ers, but to another cauſe which is not commonly attended to. It is in a great meaſure owing to the impiety and licentiouſneſs of their ſuperiors. It ought to be obſerved, that the bulk of the common people will, in one ſhape or other, be attached to religion and the worſhip of the Deity: for a ſenſe of our dependance upon God, and of our obligation to worſhip him, is the natural ſuggeſtion of the human mind, till it is by ſome external cauſe, obſtructed or expelled: and in all nations, which have not been ſunk in total darkneſs and barbarity, the generality of the common people have been ſtrongly tinctured with a ſenſe of religion. Hence, it appears to be of great importance to the public welfare, that a rational and right direction be given to the religion of the populace; and its influence made ſubſervient to the practice of thoſe moral virtues which are uſeful to ſociety. It behoves their ſuperiors, therefore, who

have received a better education and higher advantages, to direct the religion of the common people by their own example; and undoubtedly their influence, if properly employed, might have the moſt remarkable effect. Did they ſhow a ſuitable regard for God, and the inſtitutions of his ſervice, it would put it greatly in their power to model the religion of their country, and make it (as it was deſigned to be) the immediate ſpring of every thing that is amiable and uſeful in ſociety. But as long as thoſe who are diſtinguiſhed by their opulence, their ſtation, or abilities, diſcover a contempt of God and of the inſtitutions of religion, they will, inſtead of correcting, increaſe and add to the ſuperſtition of the populace. In order to avoid that profaneneſs and impiety, which they obſerve, with hatred and horror, in the conduct of their ſuperiors, they will run into the oppoſite extreme, and applaud themſelves in doing ſo.

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On this ſubject, it may deſerve our particular attention, that there ſeems to be a moſt unfortunate and hurtful oppoſition between the ſentiments and manners of thoſe who are in the higher, and thoſe who are in the lower ranks of life. The former, by their avowed indifference and contempt of all religion, rivet and increaſe the ſuperſtition of the populace, whilſt the latter, by their abſurd and uſeleſs ſuperſtitions, increaſe the irreligion and impiety of their ſuperiors. Upon the one hand, the people, ſtruck with horror at the ſight of open profaneneſs and impiety, are driven to the oppoſite extreme of ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſtic zeal; upon the other hand, thoſe who are in opulence and ſtation, moved by a contempt of this ignorance and folly of the people, run (though with equal ignorance and folly) into the extreme of irreligion and impiety. Thus each of them, alternately, promote thoſe ſenti-

ments and manners which are the object of their hatred or contempt.

In many inſtances it may be obſerved, that men are confirmed in their peculiar habits and taſtes of life, nay, are carried far greater lengths in them than they would otherwiſe have been, by their hatred or contempt of thoſe who are in a different habit and taſte of life. Thus the avarice of one man heightens in another his profuſion and extravagance. Exceſs of gaiety in ſome, promotes in others, the exceſs of moroſeneſs and reſerve; timidity and cowardice, or an exceſſive dread of imaginary danger in one, promotes in another, an imprudent and audacious contempt of real danger. In each of theſe the influence is mutual; and the like influence is to be obſerved in men's different ſentiments and habits in religion. No method, it is to be feared, will eaſily be found of remedying this evil, till thoſe in the higher ranks of life ſhall undertake,

by their example and authority, to encourage genuine and uſeful piety; and from their ſuperior education and advantages it might ſurely be expected, they would ſee the great importance of their patronage and example in this matter. It ſeems, indeed, to betray a defect either of judgment or of public ſpirit, that, not diſtinguiſhing between the effects of true religion and of ſuperſtition, they ſuffer themſelves, by a contempt of vulgar ſuperſtition, to be carried into a contempt even of genuine and uſeful piety.

The obſervations which have been made may ſuffice to ſhow the fatal influence of irreligion on the welfare of a nation. How far the preſent character and ſpirit of the Britiſh nation is under this fatal influence, every one muſt judge in the beſt manner he is able. That a ſettled habitual diſregard for the providence of God, the goſpel of his ſon, and the ſacred inſtitutions of his ſervice, hath ſpread its influence and ap-

peared in a more avowed and public manner, than was known in former times, eſpecially among thoſe who ought to lead the morals of the people by their own example and authority, cannot be denied. Many, alas! are not only totally regardleſs of religion, but ſomehow ſtrangely jealous of its influence, as if it were unfriendly to the intereſts and order of ſociety. They are ſo much afraid of the effects of ſuperſtition, that they cannot bear the moſt rational and uſeful forms of piety; and thus propagate, as far as the influence of their example goes, a total inattention to, and contempt of all religion.

Should this ſpirit of irreligion continue to increaſe and extend its influence on the morals of the nation, it will gradually weaken, and, at length, deſtroy the national proſperity. From this unhappy ſpirit, will inevitably flow that corruption and depravity of manners, againſt the deſtructive conſequences of which, no people

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upon earth have been long able to preſerve their national proſperity. When the piety, and conſequently the probity and virtue of a nation is deſtroyed, the only laſting and effectual preſervatives of its proſperity are deſtroyed; other means of ſafety are but palliatives or temporary ſuſpenſions of its miſery. Tranſient advantages may be acquired by the number of its fleets and armies, by the accidental influence of a vigorous and bold adminiſtration, or by the weakneſs and miſconduct of its enemies: by theſe and the like means its commerce and wealth may be increaſed, many apparent additions may be made to its proſperity and ſtrength. But if the ſpirit of irreligion, and, in conſequence of this, licentiouſneſs and immorality prevail, the vitals of a nation muſt be waſted and impaired; and, in ſpite of all external means of preſerving its proſperity and ſtrength, this internal malady, like a ſlow but incurable conſumption in the human body,

body, will, at length, end in its deſtruction. Thus it was with the greateſt and moſt flouriſhing empire upon earth, amidſt the moſt extenſive acquiſitions of dominion, property and wealth, the corruption of its manners being equally extended and increaſed, its conqueſts and the extent of its dominions had no other conſequence, than to render its deſtruction the more total and remarkable.

Having endeavoured to point out the Importance of Religion to the Welfare of Society, the following obſervations may be natively deduced.

1ſt, That in an age which pretends to ſo much knowledge of the methods of advancing the welfare of ſociety, and to ſo much public ſpirit in promoting them, it may ſeem a ſurpriſing overſight, that ſo little account is made of the importance of Religion. It is to be acknowledged, to the honour of the preſent age, that it has carried the idea of public order and utility,

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and of the methods of eſtabliſhing and promoting them, beyond what was known in former times. Hence we may obſerve a face of order, induſtry, and commerce, and even of elegance and plenty, among perſons, almoſt in every rank of life. But is it not a ſtrange defect, that among all the different methods which have been employed for advancing the public happineſs and order, the importance of religion has not been perceived, or, at leaſt, not ſufficiently attended to.

It is likewiſe to the honour of the preſent age, that it has ſufficiently expoſed the madneſs of fanaticiſm, and the abſurdity of thoſe ſuperſtitions which prevailed in former times, and by its liberty and moderation, put an end to that rage of theological perſecution and diſpute, which had ſo long diſturbed the peace and order of ſociety. Might it not have been expected, that the ſame diſcernment which has produced theſe deſirable effects, would have likewiſe taught

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the age to make a ſuitable diſtinction between true religion and its counterfeits, and to mark their different and oppoſite effects on the welfare of ſociety? If religion, juſtly underſtood and directed to its proper influence, is conducive to the happineſs and order of ſociety, does it not become the wiſdom of an enlightened age, to mark its uſeful and important tendency, and to give it that direction and encouragement, whereby its uſefulneſs may be ſecured? If, upon the other hand, the ingenious attempts which have been made to rid the world of the miſchiefs which ariſe from ſuperſtition or fanaticiſm, have been conducted by ſuch principles as are deſtructive of genuine and uſeful piety, is not this, amidſt all our boaſted ingenuity and wiſdom, a ſad example of that weakneſs and precipitance, ſo incident to human nature, by which, avoiding one, we run into a different and oppoſite extreme, and thus *while*

we

we gather up the tares, root up alſo the wheat with them?

What may be the cauſe, that in all the different plans of civil government that have been eſtabliſhed in the world, religion has been one great object of attention to the legiſlature? The cauſe undoubtedly was, that a ſenſe of religion was conſidered as a thing of indiſpenſable importance to public virtue and proſperity, and therefore ought to have a public ſanction and eſtabliſhment in every plan of civil government. This being the origin of religious eſtabliſhments, it ought therefore to be deemed a thing of equal importance to ſociety, that religion when eſtabliſhed, be treated with proper marks of honour and reſpect, and ſuch a direction and influence given it in the thoughts of men, as might render it effectual in anſwering the purpoſes for which it was eſtabliſhed. Upon the other hand, it appears to be a great abſurdity, that religion ſhould receive a legal ſanction and

authority,

authority, as a thing of indiſpenſable importance to the public welfare, and that nevertheleſs, it ſhould be deemed a matter of indifference, whether the ſubjects of the government treat it with reſpect or with contempt.

In ancient Rome great regard was paid to the public inſtitutions of religion, and the attention of the legiſlature much employed in rendering them ſubſervient to the proſperity and virtue of the commonwealth. When ſuch attention was beſtowed on a ſyſtem of religion, full of ſuperſtition and abſurdity, whereby it was made, in many inſtances, ſubſervient to public order and proſperity; it is ſurely to be regretted, that the religion, taught in the chriſtian revelation, which, when it is juſtly underſtood, directly leads its votaries to every thing that is praiſe-worthy and uſeful in ſociety, and enforces it upon them in the ſtrongeſt manner, is neglected or deſpiſed;

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more eſpecially if this is done by perſons in the higher ranks of life, who, in other inſtances, underſtand and are concerned for the public welfare of their country, and whoſe activity and public ſpirit have appeared in the aſſiſtance they have given to every other method of advancing it.

The juſtice of theſe obſervations will appear in a ſtronger light, if we add the following reflection; That in proportion as a nation grows in opulence and power by the enlargement of its commerce or dominions, a ſenſe of religion becomes proportionably neceſſary to its preſervation and proſperity. Opulence and power, and their uſual conſequences, luxury and pleaſure, have hitherto produced corruption and licentiouſneſs in the morals of a nation; and this again has been always found to operate, at length, its diſorder and deſtruction. No ſufficient guard can be deviſed againſt this fatal proceſs, if it is not a ſenſe of God, and of the ſolemn obligations of religion,

could

could it be preſerved in the minds of men. This, no doubt, is a moſt difficult expedient, in an age of opulence and luxury, when the minds of men are ſoftened and enervated by pleaſure, and thereby diſpoſed to ſhun all ſerious attention to the Deity. But, though difficult, it is not impoſſible. Could thoſe, in the higher ſtations of life, who underſtand, and feel for the welfare of their country, be prevailed upon to give their attention to this matter, and from a noble patriotiſm, that can riſe above the prejudices and faſhions of a diſſipated age, reſolve, by their example and authority, to propagate a ſenſe of genuine and uſeful piety, we might ſtill expect, by the bleſſing of almighty God, on ſuch a generous attempt, to ſee its happy influence on public virtue and proſperity, in ſpite of that unhappy influence by which it is oppoſed by the growth of opulence and luxury. We might ſee, for once, that fatal circle broke, or, at leaſt, long retarded in its progreſs,

greſs, whereby nations have proceeded from induſtry to opulence, from opulence to luxury, from luxury to corruption and depravity, and from thence returned to poverty and deſolation.

2d, From what hath been ſuggeſted in the preceding diſcourſe, it may be obſerved, that it is of great importance to the credit of religion, that the public teachers of it point out, with ſufficient plainneſs and preciſion, the ſtrong obligations it lays men under to the practice of thoſe duties, which are immediately conducive to the welfare of ſociety. The diſrepute into which religion, and the public inſtitutions of the goſpel, have unfortunately fallen with many in the preſent age, is in a great meaſure owing, or very much encouraged, by an apprehenſion, that the religion practiſed by the common people, is unconnected with, or has very little influence on their conduct in ſociety. They who worſhip God, and are moſt aſſiduous in their attendance on the

inſtitutions of His ſervice, are not, it is alleged, made thereby better members of ſociety, or more dutiful and uſeful, in their ſtations, than other men.

To remove this odious imputation, the teachers of religion cannot be too explicit, or ſolicitous to lead the people to a juſt idea of the importance of their ſocial and moral obligations, and to mark in the plaineſt manner, their immediate connexion with the principle of piety to God: for if theſe two ſhould ever appear to be disjoined, or unconnected with each other, religion will inevitably fall into contempt. The teachers of religion ſhould be ſo much the more attentive and ſolicitous in this particular, as the prevailing bias of the populace, in every age, hath been, to ſubſtitute an attachment to external forms of piety, in the place of the uſeful and active virtues of a holy life. The religion of the Phariſees, which was a religion of external form, has been, more or leſs, the favourite ſyſtem of the

the populace in every age. Although no religion upon earth ever guarded men in ſtronger terms againſt this popular miſtake, than that which is delivered in the goſpel; although the moral and ſocial duties of life are no where inculcated with higher expreſſions of regard; yet this unhappy bias ſtill prevails with many, who profeſs the religion of the goſpel.

For the ſame reaſon, it is of great importance to the credit of religion, that the worſhipers of God, and the hearers of the goſpel, liſten with due attention and regard to thoſe inſtructions, which are intended to explain the moral and ſocial duties of the Chriſtian life, and their immediate connexion with the principle of piety to God. It muſt appear a lamentable thing, to thoſe who feel a ſerious regard for the intereſt and credit of religion, that ſo many in the preſent age openly avow their contempt of all religion, and of the inſtitutions of the goſpel. Let ſuch ſerious perſons, at the

ſame time, be perſuaded to conſider, that nothing will contribute more effectually to expoſe this impiety and folly, and to ſtop the mouths of the infidels and ſcoffers of the preſent age, than to make them ſee the beneficial effects of true religion in the lives of men. Let them be able to obſerve, that religion makes men uſefuller and better men in every circumſtance of life: that its immediate effect is to check the influence of every hurtful and unamiable paſſion in the hearts of men, and to attach them with invariable conſtancy, *to whatſoever things are honeſt, juſt, and pure, lovely, or of good report.* Let them ſee that religion makes them better parents, and better children, better maſters, and better ſervants, more kind and faithful friends, more gentle and forgiving enemies; and, in a word, more heartily diſpoſed to all thoſe virtuous and uſeful offices of life, which belong to their ſeveral ſtations in ſociety. This is undoubtedly the tendency, and the genuine effect,

effect, of that religion which is taught by Chriſtianity. It is given in the ſcripture, *That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works.* Were the worſhipers of God, and all who fear his holy name, thus diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of men, it would cauſe every man, who has any ſenſe of decency or public good, to be aſhamed of that contempt of piety, and of the ſacred inſtitutions of the goſpel, which is ſo common in the preſent age. The *light of Chriſtians, ſhining in this manner, before men,* would make them *glorify their Father which is in heaven.*

DISCOURSE III.

Of believing in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

JOHN vi. 29.

This is the Work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath ſent.

IT was the manner of our bleſſed Saviour to take occaſion, from the external occurrences of life, to introduce the moral and religious inſtructions of the goſpel. From the miracle by which he had fed ſeveral thouſand people with a few ſmall loaves and fiſhes, he had taken occaſion to exhort his hearers, *to labour, not for the meat that periſheth, but for the meat which endureth to ever-*

everlaſting life. To this exhortation, ſome of the people preſent had replied, *What ſhall we do that we may work the works of God?* They were diſpleaſed, it would appear, with the exhortation he had given them; whereby he intended to withdraw their attention from the benefits they expected from his miracles, to the ſuperiour advantages they might receive from his inſtructions: and their anſwer ſignified, that they had already ſufficient knowledge of their duty, and did not attend upon him with a view to be informed of it. They ſaid unto him, *What ſhall we do that we may work the works of God?* i. e. God has given us his law, to inſtruct us in the knowledge of our duty; can you teach us any thing that is of greater importance, or more acceptable to God, than what we already know? To this our Saviour anſwered in the text, *This is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom He hath ſent*; as if he had ſaid, I have ſomething more to inform you of,

than what you have learned from the laws of Moſes, and which, in a very particular manner, God requires of you at preſent, as your duty; and that is, *That ye believe on Him whom He hath ſent.*

In diſcourſing from this text, we ſhall conſider,

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by believing on him whom God hath ſent.

Secondly, The importance of this duty, and in what ſenſe it is to be deemed the work of God.

1ſt, What are we to underſtand by believing in *Him whom God hath ſent.* To ſet this matter in the cleareſt light, it will be proper to conſider this inſtruction of our Saviour. Firſt, as it was directed by him to the Jews, who were then preſent with him; and, 2dly, as it is to be directed to Chriſtians, who have been baptized, and continue in the profeſſion of the Chriſtian faith. Some diſtinction is to be obſerved in the ſenſe and meaning of our Saviour's inſtruction,

tion, when it is conſidered in theſe different lights, ariſing from the different ſituation of the perſons, to whom it is ſuppoſed to be addreſſed.

It is firſt to be inquired, in what ſenſe it was demanded of the Jews, to whom this inſtruction was originally given, to *believe on Him whom God had ſent.* It appears from the whole tenour of the hiſtory and inſtructions of our bleſſed Saviour, that when he called upon the Jews to believe on him, and repreſented this belief as a thing of indiſpenſable importance; he meant to ſignify, by this expreſſion, in the firſt place, that they ſhould aſſent unto, and acknowledge the truth of this important fact, That he was come into the world as the meſſenger, and Son of God, and the true Meſſiah; whom he had promiſed by his prophets to ſend from heaven. That this was the ſenſe in which the Jews underſtood this expreſſion, ſufficiently appears from the reply they made in the following verſe; they

ſaid,

ſaid, *What ſign ſheweſt thou then, that we may ſee, and believe thee; what doſt thou work?* The expreſſion is to be underſtood in the ſame ſenſe, in many other paſſages of the hiſtory of the goſpel. Thus, in the goſpel of St. John *, and *many more believed, becauſe of his own word, and ſaid unto the woman; now we believe not becauſe of thy ſaying, for we have heard him ourſelves, and know that this is indeed the Chriſt, the Saviour of the world.* Thus alſo our bleſſed Saviour †, *I ſaid therefore unto you, that ye ſhall die in your ſins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye ſhall die in your ſins.* ‡ *I know that thou hearеſt me always: but becauſe of the people that ſtood by I ſaid it, that they may believe that thou haſt ſent me.* ‖ *Now I tell you before it come to paſs, that you may believe that I am he.* § *They have known ſurely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didſt ſend me.* In theſe, and many

* John iv. 21. † John viii. 24. ‡ Jo. xi. 42.
‖ Jo. xiii. 19. § Jo. xvii. 8.

other

other paſſages that might be quoted, it appears, that the belief which Jeſus demanded from the Jews, was their giving credit to, and acknowledging the truth of the account which he had given of himſelf, viz. That he was the Sent of God, or the true Meſſiah. This is ſtill more expreſsly ſignified in that ſolemn acknowledgment which was made by the apoſtle Peter, in his own, and in the name of the reſt of the diſciples, in this ſame chapter *, *Then Simon Peter anſwered him, Lord, to whom ſhall we go? for thou only haſt the words of eternal life: and we believe, and are ſure, that thou art the Chriſt, the Son of the living God.*

Two objections have been made to this account of believing in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt:

1ſt, That a man's belief, in the ſenſe juſt now explained, being an idea or perception in the underſtanding, which de-

* John vi. 68.

pends

pends not on his choice, but is determined by the evidence which is given of the truth of what he is to believe, it cannot therefore be underſtood to be the ſubject of a law, or demanded of him as the condition of his happineſs.

2dly, That a man's belief, in the ſenſe now given to it, does not enter into his moral character, which is to be determined from the diſpoſitions of his heart and the tenor of his conduct; but not from his opinion or belief: and that, therefore, it is the firſt of theſe only, that can render a man acceptable to God, and be made the condition of his favour.

To the firſt of theſe objections, the obvious anſwer is, that though a man's opinion or belief does not immediately depend upon his choice, but upon the evidence which is ſet before him, in order to determine his belief, yet his candour, integrity, and diligence, in attending to, and examining the evidence which is ſet before him; this

depends

depends upon his will and choice, and is therefore the proper ſubject of a law. Now this was what the bleſſed Jeſus, with relation to the character and office which he claimed, had the ſtrongeſt title to demand from the people of Jeruſalem. If then, their believing on him depended on their candour and integrity, in attending to the evidence which he offered in proof of his divine commiſſion; if, upon the exerciſe of this integrity, their belief would have immediately enſued; if what only prevented it, was the want of this upright and virtuous ſtate of mind; our Saviour, with great juſtice and propriety, demanded this belief; and with equal juſtice and propriety commended thoſe whoſe belief was determined in this manner, whilſt he upbraided and condemned thoſe who remained in unbelief.

That this was the ſituation of the Jews in our Saviour's days, and the ground on which he proceeded with them, when he commanded

commanded them to believe he was the Sent of God, ſufficiently appears from the hiſtory of the goſpel; and he declared this to be the caſe, in the ſtrongeſt terms *: *If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak it of myſelf:* i. e. if a man is ſincerely deſirous to know, and do the will of God, on every diſcovery which he is pleaſed to make of it, this ſincerity of heart will lead him to perceive, from the evidence which I have ſet before him, that my doctrine is from God. Hence he aſcribed their unbelief to the unfairneſs and corruption of their hearts; † *How can ye believe which receive honour one from another, and ſeek not the honour which cometh from God only.* § *He that believeth is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, becauſe he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God; and*

* John vii. 17. † John v. 44. § John iii. 18.

this

this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil. Here, men's loving darkneſs rather than light, or their ſhutting out the evidence of truth, with a view to hide the guilt of their evil deeds, and to practiſe them without remorſe, is given by our Saviour, as the cauſe of their unbelief, and the reaſon why it will ſubject them to condemnation.

2. The other objection made to the account which has been given of believing in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt is, that a man's belief is no part of his moral character, which is to be determined from the diſpoſitions of his heart and the tenor of his conduct; but not from his belief. It has therefore been contended, by the adverſaries of the goſpel, that this was improperly demanded, as the work of God, or the term of their acceptance with him.

To obviate this objection, it ought to be conſidered, that when our Saviour demanded

manded this belief, and inſiſted on it with the Jews, as the *work of God*, it was not merely on its own account, or as it ſtood detached from thoſe effects which it was intended, and fitted to produce in the heart and life of the believer; but becauſe of its connexion with, and tendency to produce them. Amongſt the Jews, in particular, to whom our Saviour firſt addreſſed the doctrine of the goſpel, there was a much ſtronger and a more immediate connexion between this belief, and its practical influence upon their heart and life, than amongſt thoſe who have been educated and lived in the profeſſion of the Chriſtian religion from their earlieſt years. The ſituation of the Jews was very different from ours in this reſpect.

Although the evidence, which Jeſus gave of his being the Sent of God, was ſufficient to determine the aſſent of every candid and impartial inquirer; yet conſidering the peculiar prejudices, under which

the people of Jerusalem laboured from their earliest years; the wrong conceptions which they had from thence received of the character of the Messiah, and the end of his coming to the world; the opposition which stood in the way of their belief, from the example and authority of those who were in the highest reputation for piety and wisdom; considering withal, the hatred and contempt, and the many other disadvantages which were likely to attend their belief and acknowledgment that Jesus was the Christ; it required a more than ordinary share of candour and integrity, to admit the force of the evidence which he set before them of his being the Messiah, and to acknowledge it before the world. It required such a degree of candour and integrity, and strength of mind, as could hardly fail of having that religious and moral influence upon their lives, with a view to which it was demanded by our Saviour; nay, in their peculiar situation, it required

a less degree of honesty and virtue, to submit to the laws of the christian religion in the conduct of their lives, after it was believed to be from God, than was previously requisite to their believing and acknowledging its truth before the world.

Let it be considered that the first disciples of the Lord Jesus, or such of the people of Jerusalem as publickly acknowledged him to be the true Messiah, were persons whom neither the strongest prejudice of education, nor the greatest weight of example and authority, nor the most violent temptations from interest and reputation, could prevent their making this acknowledgment; and from thence we may infer with the highest probability, that the same integrity and honesty of heart, which produced this acknowledgment, was likely to produce their submission to the laws and instructions of the gospel in the subsequent conduct of their lives.

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What has been obſerved may ſuggeſt a ſufficient anſwer to the queſtion which is ſometimes put to Chriſtians, by the adverſaries of the goſpel: why did Jeſus require, with ſo much earneſtneſs, that the people of Jeruſalem ſhould believe and acknowledge that he was the Chriſt? He required it, as a proof of that integrity and candour, which, in their peculiar circumſtances, he perceived would be likely to produce their obedience to the laws and inſtructions of the goſpel in their future conduct. Agreeably to this interpretation of the matter, it appears, that when any of the Jews, ſtruck by the force of evidence, were convinced he was the Chriſt; but had, at the ſame time, a wrong apprehenſion of his character, and were therefore likely to abandon him, when his real character and deſigns ſhould afterwards appear; he inſiſted on their continuing in the profeſſion of the Chriſtian faith, and in their obedience to it, in their future conduct, before he could ac-

knowledge them to be his true diſciples. Thus, in the goſpel of St. John *; *as he ſpake theſe words many believed on him. Then ſaid Jeſus to theſe Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my diſciples indeed: and ye ſhall know the truth, and the truth ſhall make you free.* For the ſame reaſon, when any of the Jews, overpowered by the evidence of his miracles, were ſecretly convinced that he was the Chriſt, but had not the integrity and fortitude to acknowledge their belief before the world, their faith was in that caſe declared by our Saviour to be, an inſignificant and uſeleſs thing †. *Among the chief rulers alſo many believed on him: but becauſe of the phariſees, they did not confeſs him, leſt they ſhould be put out of the Synagogue; for they loved the praiſe of men more than the praiſe of God.*

2. Having conſidered the nature of that belief which our Saviour demanded from

* John viii. 30. † John xii. 42.

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the Jews, we are to conſider, in the next place, in what ſenſe he called it *the work of God.* By this expreſſion, it is probable our Saviour meant to ſignify, that their believing on him, was the firſt and fundamental duty of the goſpel which he taught; of peculiar importance to their future happineſs; which, therefore, God did now require of them, as the term of their acceptance with him. And from what hath been obſerved on the circumſtances of the Jews, to whom this inſtruction was addreſſed, it may be eaſy to perceive the importance of this duty, and with what propriety and juſtice it was called by him, *The work of God.* To this purpoſe, let it be obſerved;

1ſt, That until they had attained that candour and integrity of mind, which ſhould have led them to a fair examination, and admiſſion of the evidence he had given of his being the Son of God, they were in a corrupted and immoral ſtate of mind; as Jeſus himſelf expreſſes it, *They loved dark-*

neſs rather than light. This was a ſtate of mind which, under every diſpenſation of religion, muſt be hateful in the ſight of God, and a bar to men's acceptance with him: nay, it is ſuch a ſtate of mind as muſt prevent every religious improvement men are capable of receiving, either from the diſpenſations of the providence of God, or from ſuch revelations of his will, as he may, at any time, be pleaſed to give them. Jeſus therefore demanded of the Jews that they ſhould believe on him whom God had ſent, and called this belief *the work of God*, as it ſtood immediately connected with that integrity and honeſty of heart, without which they could not, in any ſituation, be acceptable to God.

2. Let it be obſerved, that until the Jews, to whom our Saviour directed the inſtruction of the text, believed on him as the Sent of God, he could be of no advantage to their ſouls; and the purpoſe of his coming to the world (as to them) would have been entirely

entirely diſappointed. Jeſus did not offer his inſtructions to the world in the character of a philoſopher, or of one who taught men their duty, and the way to happineſs, on the theories of human wiſdom, ſupported by a philoſophical inveſtigation and inquiry. In that caſe, he might have left the inſtructions which he gave, to be received on the footing of that reaſoning and philoſophy, whereby he ſupported them, whatever might be men's opinion or belief of his own character and deſigns. But he offered the inſtructions of the goſpel, in a very different and a much more intereſting character. He offered them, as a teacher ſent from God; and therefore (added to their own intrinſic excellence and uſefulneſs) they were to be received, as a revelation of the will of God, ratified and ſealed by his authority. Some of his inſtructions too, were of ſuch a kind, that they could not be admitted, but upon the foot of this authority; as

they could not either be inveſtigated, or ſupported, by the reaſon and philoſophy of men; but contained an account of ſome important facts, in the government of God, impoſſible to be known, except by an immediate revelation of the mind of God; nay, ſome of the inſtructions which he gave the world, and which are of the higheſt importance in the ſyſtem of the goſpel, related to his own character and office, and the purpoſes for which God had ſent him to the world; and it is evident, theſe could not be received but upon the belief of his being a teacher ſent immediately from God.

From what hath been obſerved, it may appear of how much conſequence it was, that thoſe to whom the bleſſed Jeſus offered his inſtructions, ſhould believe he was the Sent of God; and why, in the firſt place, and with ſo much earneſtneſs, he inſiſted upon this, when he opened his commiſſion. His character and office being ſuch as he deſcribes;

deſcribes; their believing on him, and receiving him, as the Sent of God, was indiſpenſably pre-requiſite to their acceptance of the meſſage which he brought from God, and to all the religious improvements, which he intended to conduct them to, by the ſubſequent inſtructions of the goſpel. Nay, if Jeſus came into the world inveſted with the character and office which he claimed, the firſt and fundamental inſtruction of the goſpel, from the nature of the caſe, could be no other, than men's believing on him, as the meſſenger of God, and their paying him a ſuitable regard in this important character. This view of the caſe ſuggeſts a full anſwer to the queſtion, why did Jeſus inſiſt, and lay ſuch ſtreſs on men's believing that he was the Sent of God, and why he called it *the work of God*. It was *the work of God*, as it was the requiſite foundation, upon which alone he could proceed to enlighten and purify the ſouls of men. Till this firſt point was gained,

gained, his office and instructions could be of no significancy or avail.

The sum of what hath been observed is, that our Saviour, in the first place, demanded of the Jews, that they should acknowledge him to be the messenger of God. This demand was made by him, as it stood connected with that honesty and candour, with which it was their duty to attend to the evidence he gave of the truth of his divine commission; and as it was necessary to prepare them for the subsequent instructions, and improvements, he intended to communicate.

Having considered the instruction of our Saviour in the text, as it was addressed to the people of Jerusalem; let us, in the next place, inquire in what sense we are to understand it, when it is supposed to be addressed to those, who are already members of the Christian church, and live in the profession of the Christian faith. There is one obvious difference between these two, viz.

viz. that a peculiar effort of integrity and candour was requisite amongst the Jews of our Saviour's time, ere they could acknowledge that he was the Christ: such a degree of it, as, in their situation, was likely to produce a sincere obedience to the precepts of the gospel in their future conduct. But, in *our* situation, the same acknowledgment does neither pre-suppose such integrity and candour, nor does it, in the same manner, stand connected with our obedience to the gospel. On the contrary, no two things are more remote, or oftener separated from one another, than that belief which is usually entertained by persons educated in the profession of the Christian faith; and the proper influence of this belief upon their conduct.

Hence it follows, that the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is to be esteemed *the work of God*, among those who have been educated in the profession of the Christian revelation, must signify, such a belief of

of the truth and importance of his character, as actually produces that dependance on him, and obedience to his laws, with which it ought to be connected, and which it was ſuppoſed, and was likely to be connected with, among the Jews, to whom this inſtruction was firſt addreſſed. When the Jews, in our Saviour's time, believed, and publicly acknowledged that he was the Chriſt, this belief and acknowledgment muſt have proceeded from a ſincere attention to the evidence, which he ſet before them, of the truth of his commiſſion, and from a ſerious ſenſe of its importance to the happineſs of men. But *our* belief and acknowledgment of this important truth, not proceeding from the ſame ſincerity, and ſeriouſneſs of mind, but from a very different cauſe, it is therefore often joined with a total inattention to his office, and to the nature and importance of the meſſage which he brought from God. To ſupply this material defect, and make *our* faith

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the work of God, it muſt be ſuch as actually leads us to a ſerious attention to the character and office of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and to ſuch a diſpoſition and demeanour towards him, as the merit, and importance of his character, and our connexion with it, natively ſuggeſt. This appears to be that faith in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, which is called in the New Teſtament, *going to Him, or coming to Him, receiving Him, following and learning of Him.*

To confirm the truth of the above account, it may be proper to obſerve, that, in the epiſtles which were directed by the apoſtles to profeſſing Chriſtians, who believed that Jeſus was the Chriſt; when faith is recommended and preſcribed as the mean of their acceptance with God, and the condition of their future happineſs; the practical impreſſions and effects, with which it ought to be connected in their hearts and lives, are expreſsly marked by the apoſtles, as included in it, or as its immediate

mediate effect. Thus the faith, by which the apoſtle to the *Hebrews ſays, "the elders received a good report," did not, in his view of it, ſignify merely their belief of the exiſtence and providence of the one true God, and of his faithfulneſs, and power to perform the promiſes which he had made; but ſuch an affectionate and feeling ſenſe of the great importance of theſe truths, as produced in them a firm reliance upon God, and a ready reſignation and obedience to his will.—Thus alſo the apoſtle Paul, in his Epiſtle to the Galatians †, when he deſcribes the faith, which will avail a man in Jeſus Chriſt, deſcribes it to be a *faith which works by love.* —The apoſtle James ‡, when he deſcribes the faith, which gives the believer confidence in God, deſcribes it to be a faith, which is accompanied with works of righteouſneſs, in the conduct of his life.—Thus, too, when the Gentiles were firſt

* Heb. † Gal. v. 6. ‡ James ii. 14.

admitted into the church of Chriſt, this reaſon was given by the apoſtle Peter for admitting them *, *That God had purified their hearts by faith*—Agreeable to all this, the apoſtle to the Hebrews ſpeaks of unbelief, not as an error in the underſtanding, but as a corruption, ſeated in the heart: he deſcribes it †, *as an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

From theſe, and the like apoſtolical deſcriptions of the Chriſtian faith, we muſt conclude, that that belief in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, which is to be conſidered as *the work of God in us*, ſignifies ſuch a perſuaſion of his being the Sent of God, as produces that affection and regard, which is due to the merit and importance of his character, and with which this perſuaſion ought always to be connected in the heart of every honeſt man. The office of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt is not exhibited before us in the Goſpel, as a curious, or enter-

* Acts xv. 9. † Heb. iii. 12.

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taining ſpeculation; but contains an exhibition of the moſt intereſting nature, and ſuch as ought to produce the moſt important influence on the conduct of our lives. God ſent him as a prophet to enlighten the underſtandings, and ſanctify the hearts of men, and to guide their *feet into the paths of peace.* In this view it is our duty, and our intereſt, to learn of him, and to attend with reverence, and candour, to the inſtructions which he brought from God.—He was ſent to be our great high prieſt and advocate with the Father, *to give himſelf an offering, and a ſacrifice, of a ſweet-ſmelling ſavour unto God.* In this view it is our duty, to depend upon his influence and merit in this ſacred character; *that being juſtified by faith, we may have peace with God, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord*—He is our Lord and King, and the government of this world is *laid upon his ſhoulders*; hence it becomes our duty to ſubmit to his authority, and live in obedience to his laws.

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—He is alſo ordained to be our judge; for by him we are aſſured, *God will judge the world in righteouſneſs.* In this view, we ought *to wait for the coming of the Lord Jeſus*, and to be directed in our conduct by what he hath declared to be the rule of his procedure at the final judgment of the world. Theſe regards he is intitled to from every man who believes he is the Sent of God: they are immediately ſuggeſted by the character and office which he bears, and the declared intention of his coming to the world: and every one who acknowledges him to be inveſted with theſe ſacred characters, and yet is unaffected by this knowledge and belief, muſt appear criminal and guilty in the ſight of God; and in the judgment alſo of his own conſcience, upon a calm and impartial review. When profeſſing chriſtians therefore, not only give credit to what the goſpel hath declared concerning Jeſus Chriſt, but likewiſe ſtand affected towards him, in the

manner above described, they believe on *him whom God hath sent, and do the work of God*, according to the instruction given in the text.

We are, in the last place to inquire, in what sense our believing on him, in the manner just now explained, is to be deemed *the work of God*. To this purpose observe,

1st, That it is a duty which the consciences of men, and their sense of moral obligation, must suggest, upon their being made acquainted with his character. It arises from the dignity and merit of his office, as the Sent of God, and its great importance to the happiness of men. Our obligation to this duty, when the Christian revelation is owned to be from God, is as truly of a moral nature, as the obligation we are under to a proper temper and behaviour, in any of the relations in which we stand to God, or man: and there is no consideration that can destroy the force of this peculiar obligation; that will not equally

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destroy the force of any other religious obligation whatsoever. That in one instance, our obligation is made known by the light of revelation, and in another by the light of nature, alters not the case; since it is not the manner in which we come to know the relation wherein we stand to other beings, that suggests our duty towards them; but our knowledge and assurance of the thing itself, in whatever way it is communicated to us. And upon our having got this knowledge and assurance, our moral sense, or conscience, suggests the obligation, and the nature of the thing made known prescribes the consequent duty and regard.

2dly, Let it be observed, That our believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, in the manner above explained, is not only a duty of an indispensably moral obligation, when the truth of the Christian revelation is confessed, but such as must have been required by our Saviour, as the fundamental duty of the gospel. It is by the

practice of this duty that a Chriſtian improves the character and office of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, to the purpoſes for which it was revealed. By this duty he receives the inſtructions he delivers, as the truths of God; relies upon the aſſiſtance which he offers in the way to happineſs; and thus puts himſelf into his hand as the Saviour of the world. By this means *Chriſt becomes the wiſdom of God, and the power of God to his ſalvation.* Whereas, till we have thus believed; his office, as the Sent of God, the goſpel which he taught, and every mean of light or comfort which he brought from heaven, can be, *to us*, of no advantage or avail; we muſt remain in the ſame ſtate of ignorance, depravity, and guilt, in which we were before. Hence our Saviour told the Jews †, that if *they believed not, they ſhould die in their ſins.* If we conſider the matter in this light, it muſt appear, that our Saviour, with great

† John viii. 24.

propriety,

propriety, required this belief, as *the work of God*, and the neceſſary condition of our future happineſs: nay, from the nature of the caſe, it was the firſt and fundamental inſtruction which it behoved him to give, when he publiſhed his commiſſion. If a prince ſhould ſend his ſon, to ſubjects who had rebelled againſt his government, with an offer of indemnity, and with power to fix the terms on which it was to be obtained: if withal, he ſhould declare, that not only from the motive of compaſſion, but likewiſe to do honour to the meſſenger himſelf, and as the reward of his generous interpoſition in their behalf, he had given him his commiſſion; could the term of their forgiveneſs, and admiſſion to their prince's favour, be more properly expreſſed, than by their acceptance of this meſſenger, and ſubmiſſion to him, in the character and office in which he came inveſted from his father, and in conſequence of this their compliance with the ſubſequent inſtructions

which he ſet before them? Now this is what we are to underſtand by that belief which our Saviour called *the work of God.*

From what hath been obſerved in this diſcourſe, it may ſufficiently appear, why the faith of Jeſus Chriſt is repreſented as a matter of ſuch importance in the ſyſtem of the goſpel; why the promiſes of pardon and eternal life are made to it; and why, upon the other hand, men's unbelief is repreſented as ſo criminal a thing, and ſo fatal in its conſequences to their future intereſts. Among the Jews, the guilt of unbelief lay principally in this; that from the influence of ſinful prejudice and paſſion they rejected that illuſtrious evidence, which Jeſus ſet before them, of his being the Meſſenger and Son of God. Among thoſe who profeſs the Chriſtian faith, the guilt of unbelief conſiſts in this; That owning him to be the Meſſenger and Son of God, they are nevertheleſs inattentive to his ſacred character, and to thoſe moral and divine

vine improvements from it, with a view to which it was revealed. Whilſt they are convinced, and own, that Jeſus came from God, inveſted with an office of the higheſt dignity and moment, they treat him, however, as a perſon of the utmoſt inſignificance. By this inattention or contempt, they not only fruſtrate the important purpoſes of providence in ſending him into this world, and thereby loſe the great advantages and comforts, which he is qualified and willing to beſtow; but muſt withal, be highly criminal and guilty in the ſight of God, by this irreverent and ungrateful conduct: hence our Saviour declared, that *he that believeth not is condemned:* in a word, the Father *hath committed to the Son, the words of everlaſting life,* i. e. he hath commiſſioned and empowered him to beſtow eternal happineſs upon the ſons of men, and to fix the terms of their obtaining it. When they, to whom this commiſſion is revealed, do either wantonly, or from ſin-

ful prejudice, reject it; or acknowledging its truth, are, however, inattentive to the purpoſes for which it was revealed, they diſappoint the laſt expedient of divine wiſdom and benignity, for delivering men from ſin and miſery, and leading them to holineſs and immortality.

We may conclude with the following obſervation, which naturally ariſes from what hath been delivered in this diſcourſe; that the man who has an honeſt heart, and is candidly diſpoſed to receive and do the will of God, on every diſcovery he ſhall be pleaſed to make of it, is the diſciple and friend of Jeſus Chriſt; or, at leaſt, is in that ſtate of mind which diſpoſes and prepares him for being his diſciple and his friend. He is poſſeſſed of the diſpoſition which Jeſus approved, and promiſed to reward in thoſe, by whom his inſtructions were embraced; and the want of which he condemned in thoſe by whom they were rejected and deſpiſed. Piety and honeſty

neſty of heart, when underſtood in its juſt extent, as denoting an impartial regard to the will of God, in every ſignification he is pleaſed to give of it, is therefore, according to the goſpel, the great mean of men's acceptance with their Maker. God knows, in every nation upon earth, the man who has that piety and honeſty of heart, which would lead him to embrace the goſpel of his ſon, were it fairly laid before him, and *in every nation, he who feareth God and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him.* Although no creature, conſcious of guilt, (and ſuch is every man) can claim acceptance with his Maker, on the merit of his conduct, yet may we not believe, that through the merit of the great Redeemer of mankind, every man, in every nation upon earth, in whom is found the probity and candour which would lead him to believe on Jeſus, as the Sent of God, if he had had the opportunity of knowing him, ſhall be *accepted with him.* Thoſe, indeed, to whom

whom the goſpel is revealed, have no ground to hope for the divine favour and acceptance, except on their explicit application for it, in the manner the goſpel hath preſcribed, viz. by an humble dependance on that efficacy in the death of Chriſt, which our Saviour himſelf and his apoſtles have aſcribed to it. Nevertheleſs, in a perfect conſiſtency with this, it may be hoped, that this bleſſed efficacy ſhall extend to the caſe of thoſe to whom the goſpel never was revealed, ſo far, at leaſt, as to procure for them, ſuch meaſures of condeſcenſion and forgiveneſs, and ſuch an acceptance of their honeſty and candour as they could not have otherwiſe obtained.

This remark, which, on calm attention, will be found agreeable to the whole ſpirit and tenor of our Saviour's inſtructions, deſtroys at once the force of that objection to the Chriſtian faith, which ſome philoſophers have urged with ſo much triumph, viz. that it hath preſcribed a term of men's

acceptance

acceptance with their Maker, and of their future happiness; which however, to more than one half of the human race, who never heard, nor ever had it in their power to hear of the Christian revelation, is utterly impossible.

DISCOURSE IV.

On the Hiſtory of the Fall of our Firſt Parents.

GENESIS iii. 1—6.

Now the ſerpent was more ſubtile than any beaſt of the field, which the Lord God had made: and he ſaid unto the woman, Yea, hath God ſaid, ye ſhall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman ſaid unto the ſerpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midſt of the garden, God hath ſaid, ye ſhall not eat of it, neither ſhall ye touch it, leſt ye die. And the ſerpent ſaid unto the woman, Ye ſhall not ſurely die; for God knoweth, that in the day ye

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eat thereof, then your eyes ſhall be opened: and ye ſhall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.

THE hiſtory of the fall of our firſt parents is, in ſome circumſtances of it, encumbered with difficulties, which it is not our preſent purpoſe to conſider. It may be proper, however, to obſerve, on that part of it which has been read; that the ſerpent, by whom it is ſaid, the woman was deceived, was in reality, that artful and accurſed ſpirit, who is called in ſcripture, Satan, or the devil; and who, to execute his malicious deſign, had aſſumed the ſerpent's form. We cannot otherwiſe account for the ſubtilty and art, and the faculty of ſpeech, which are here aſcribed unto the ſerpent. This interpretation, likewiſe, is agreeable to thoſe many paſſages of ſcripture, where the temptations that ſinners meet with to the commiſſion of iniquity, are aſcribed to Satan, who is therefore

therefore called † *a liar, and the father of lies:* it more eſpecially agrees with the denomination which is given to the devil by St. John §, *That old ſerpent, called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.*

In diſcourſing from this paſſage of ſacred hiſtory, it is principally propoſed to direct your attention to the manner in which our firſt parents loſt their innocence and happineſs, and fell into a ſtate of guilt and miſery. This, you will obſerve, was owing to the flattery and lies that were ſet in oppoſition to the truth of God. He had ſaid to our firſt parents, *Of the tree which is in the midſt of the garden, ye ſhall not eat; for in the day ye eat thereof ye ſhall ſurely die.* But the ſerpent ſaid unto the woman, *Ye ſhall not ſurely die; for God knoweth, that the day ye eat thereof, your eyes ſhall be opened, and ye ſhall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.* Thus he artfully inſinuated into the mind of Eve a conception of the matter, dif-

† John viii. 44. § Rev. xii. 9.

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ferent from, nay, directly oppoſite to that which had been given by her Creator. She unhappily giving credit to this inſinuation, and Adam by her influence, ventured to tranſgreſs the divine command, and thereby loſt their innocence and happineſs.

Thus ſin, and miſery its neceſſary conſequence, were introduced into this world, by the influence of falſehood and deceit. God had ſaid to our firſt parents, that death ſhould be the conſequence of tranſgreſſing his command: but Satan deſcribed their tranſgreſſion of it, as what might be committed with perfect ſafety; nay, with ſome very ſingular advantages. Truſting to his flattering, artificial deſcription, they forgot the ſolemn warning which was given by their Maker, and thus involved themſelves in guilt and miſery.

By attention to the hiſtory and experience of the world, and to what often paſſes in our own breaſts, we may be able to perceive,

ceive, that by ſome ſimilar falſehood and deceit, the degenerate and unfortunate poſterity of Adam, are, to this preſent day, ſeduced to their deſtruction.—Sinners, ſince that fatal period, continue to put various impoſtures on themſelves, and to give flattering deſcriptions to their own minds, of the nature and conſequences of their guilty conduct: and thus, *after the ſimilitude of Adam*, proceed in their tranſgreſſions of the law of God, with hopes of ſafety and ſucceſs.

This too, is the account which is given us in ſcripture, of the continuance and progreſs of iniquity among mankind. Sinners are there ſaid, to be *deceived by the deceitfulneſs of ſin:—to flatter themſelves in their own eyes:—to turn the truth of God into a lie:—to be in the ſnare of the devil, and taken captive by him at his will.*

The doctrine, therefore, which I would obſerve, and lead your attention to from this part of ſacred hiſtory, is, that religion

religion which consists in a dutiful regard and obedience to the will of God, is founded, and proceeds upon the knowledge of the truth, and derives its efficacy on the heart of man, from a just discernment of the real state of things, as they are in nature: whereas, wickedness or disobedience to the will of God, proceeds from ignorance, and is supported by error and deceit.

When God, charging our first parents not to eat of the tree in the midst of the garden, warned them of the consequence of transgressing his command, and assured them it would have a fatal influence upon their future interest; he then truly and fairly set before them, the real nature of the case. When Satan, on the other hand, enticing them to eat of the forbidden tree, gave a different and opposite representation of the case; he *changed the truth of God into a lie*, and availed himself of a detestable falsehood and deceit. In like manner,

their degenerate poſterity, continuing to tranſgreſs the divine commands, darken, and impoſe upon themſelves; and in place of thoſe important truths of God, whereby he teſtifies againſt the wickedneſs which they commit, ſubſtitute ſome artful, flattering deceit. Hence the prevalence of religion and virtue among men, is, with great ſignificancy, called in ſcripture, *The kingdom of light and truth*; and the prevalence of ſin, *The kingdom, and the power of darkneſs*. In the firſt of theſe, men are guided, by a juſt diſcernment of the real ſtate of things as they are in nature; in the laſt, they are miſled by error and deceit.—Hence with a like ſignificancy, the ſcriptures repreſent the Creator of the world, as the ruler and protector of the kingdom of light and truth; and good men, as the dutiful and loyal ſubjects of his kingdom; whilſt Satan is deſcribed, as the ruler of the kingdom and power of darkneſs; and wicked men, as captives in his dark

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and miſerable kingdom.—Hence, in fine, it is, that Jeſus Chriſt, the redeemer of mankind, is ſaid to have been ſent from heaven, *to deſtroy the works of the devil.* His influence is called *the marvelous light of God,* and *the glorious freedom of His children*; and His diſciples are ſaid, to have *their eyes opened,* to be *turned from darkneſs to light,* and *from the power of Satan unto God.*

Thus, by the original conſtitution of our nature, there was fixed an immediate connexion between truth and wiſdom in the underſtanding, and the exerciſe of piety and goodneſs in the heart of man. By this original conſtitution, the great truths of God, were they ſeen in all their evidence, and attended to in all their conſequences, would irreſiſtibly determine men to do the will of God, and live in obedience to his commands. Our firſt parents had hitherto preſerved their innocence, by a firm belief of the truth, which their maker had declared, *That in the day they eat of the tree in*

the midſt of the garden, they ſhould ſurely die. When Satan therefore formed the intention of corrupting them, his firſt attempt was to darken and miſlead their underſtandings, and create in them a diſbelief of this awful declaration: he knew no other method by which he would be able to accompliſh his malicious deſign. The tranſgreſſion of God's command, which they had been told, would have a moſt pernicious influence upon their future happineſs, Satan repreſented, as an harmleſs, nay, a beneficial thing. Dazzled and deceived by his inſinuating artifice, they loſt ſight of the ſolemn admonition which was given them, and thus ventured to tranſgreſs the command of God, with hopes of impunity and ſafety. Had they not liſtened to, and at length believed the flatteries and lies that were ſuggeſted by this grand deceiver, the truth of God, kept fully in their view, would have baffled all his artifice and malice.

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It is in the ſame manner, that this grand deceiver ſtill deceives the world, and that the heart of man, corrupted by his artifice, impoſes on itſelf. Our bleſſed Saviour has given this account of the origin and progreſs of iniquity among mankind. * *Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* That is, every one, who wilfully committeth what is wrong, is forced to the unnatural and hateful ſhift of *loving darkneſs, rather than light*, or of concealing from himſelf, by flatteries and lies, the hateful nature, and ſad effects of the wrong which he commits. Our Saviour adds, *He comes not to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* He avoids a clear diſcernment of the truths of God, leſt he ſhould perceive his own deformity and guilt, and be thereby forced into a painful condemnation of himſelf.

* John iii. 20.

Did wickedneſs appear to the conſciences of men, in its natural and proper ſhape; were its fatal conſequences in the government of God, placed fairly and fully in their view, it would be almoſt impoſſible for them, deliberately to practiſe it. All the underſtanding and diſcernment, which God hath given them, and every motive that is fitted to influence the conduct of a reaſonable creature, would riſe up together in reſiſtance to it. But it was at firſt admitted into this world by flatteries and lies; and by the ſame means it ſtill maintains its baneful empire in the heart of man. On this account, ſinners are, with great propriety, in ſcripture denominated fools; and ſin is denominated folly. Every ſinner, when he violates the laws of God, is befooled, and cheated, by his own imagination, and the arts of Satan, in a matter that concerns his everlaſting intereſt; and were it not for the impoſtures, which he puts upon himſelf, he would inſtantly abandon the

the evil of his ways, as the moſt pernicious and deſpicable folly. Sinners may allege, as they often do, that the friends of religion are the credulous, and ſimple part of mankind; but the greateſt ſimpletons on earth, are they who are deceived by the deceitfulneſs of ſin, and the ſnares of Satan, to their own deſtruction. *As the fiſhes that are taken in an evil net, and the birds that are caught in the ſnare, ſo are the ſons of men ſnared in an evil time, when it falleth ſuddenly upon them.*

Before we finiſh the illuſtration of the doctrine, ſuggeſted from this part of ſacred hiſtory, it is proper to make the following obſervation, That though wickedneſs derives its efficacy from the arts of falſehood and deceit; yet, by a ſerious attention to the truths of God, impreſſed upon the heart of man, by the ſpirit of the God of truth, its deceitfulneſs may be expoſed, and the malice of the grand deceiver happily controlled. Adam had, undoubtedly, ability

from God, to detect the artifice of his deſtroyer; and might have baffled all the efforts of his fraud: and although the faculties of man have been ſadly weakened ſince his firſt apoſtacy from God, yet by the aſſiſtance of the Great Reſtorer of the human race, he may be ſtill able to eſcape the ſnares that are laid for his deſtruction. It is therefore ſtill owing to a voluntary falſehood, and diſhoneſty of heart, and a willingneſs to be deceived, that any of the ſons of men are drawn into deſtruction. In this manner the apoſtle Paul accounts for the idolatry and darkneſs which overſpread the heathen world. * *When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh hearts were darkened.—As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.*—Thus alſo he accounts for the

* Rom. i. 28.

apostacy and corruption of the Christian church. * *Because they received not the knowledge of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.*

From the illustration given of the doctrine, observed from this part of sacred history, the following reflections naturally arise:

First, We may observe the interesting light, in which it leads us to consider the character and office of our blessed Lord. *He* was manifested, we are told, † *to destroy the works of Satan*, that is, to reverse the artifice, by which he corrupted our first parents, and to rescue their posterity from its pernicious effects. By the snares of Satan, sin entered into this world, *and death by sin.* By Jesus Christ, *grace and truth* came into the world, and *life and immortality were brought to light.* He is therefore

* 2 Thess. ii. 11. † 1 John iii. 8.

called

called *the true and living way*; and whoſoever follows him, *ſhall not walk in darkneſs, but ſhall ſee the light of life.* By his heavenly direction, he ſhall clearly ſee thoſe ſacred and important truths, which, by the fall of our firſt parents, were unhappily involved in darkneſs. He ſhall gradually eſcape from the miſeries, which ſin has introduced amongſt the human race; and, at length, ſhall be conducted to a better paradiſe, than that from which our firſt parents were expelled. Happy then are they who reſign themſelves unto the influence of his unerring light; miſerable, doubly miſerable, are they, who wilfully remain in the fatal error and iniquity of their firſt parents, whilſt he, who is the *true and living way*, and the *great ſhepherd* of the ſheep, is offering to conduct them.

2dly, We may obſerve, what a ſtrong argument is ſuggeſted by the doctrine as above explained, in favour of a religious life. Religion, conſiſting in a courſe of obe-

obedience to the will of God, is that courſe of life, which the moſt enlightened, and unbiaſſed exerciſe of underſtanding, would perſuade us to; and which every man, did he calmly and candidly attend to its real nature, and certain conſequences, would undoubtedly embrace. Irreligion, on the other hand, proceeds upon a fatal ignorance, or a miſtaken apprehenſion of its real nature and effects; and every ſinner, did he ſee himſelf, and the iſſues of his conduct in their proper light, would find himſelf reduced to the neceſſity, either of abandoning a ſinful life, or of living ſelf-condemned. Hence, in the holy ſcriptures, men are called, *to think upon their ways, and ſhew that they are men.—To ponder the path of their feet, that their ways may be eſtabliſhed*; and our bleſſed Saviour, to mark the ignorance and folly of a ſinner, deſcribes the prodigal, * *as coming to him-*

* Luke xv. 17.

ſelf,

ſelf, i. e. as coming to the exerciſe of his underſtanding, when he thought of returning to his father's houſe. What an intereſting and important difference is this; how forcibly ſhould it recommend religion to the choice of every reaſonable man!

3dly, We may obſerve, from the doctrine, ſuggeſted by the paſſage of ſacred hiſtory now before us; that the happineſs and ſatisfaction, which religion gives, reſts upon a ſolid and immovable foundation. Proceeding from a juſt diſcernment of the truths of God, and of the real ſtate of things as they are in nature, it muſt therefore remain immoveably the ſame, whilſt theſe truths of God, and this diſcernment of them, ſhall remain. Had our firſt parents continued in the knowledge and belief of the truth, which their Maker had declared, they had preſerved their innocence, and their happineſs for ever. Their departure from the happineſs of their firſt eſtate proceeded from their departure from the truth

into

into a lie.—Hence by the wiſe man † the righteous is ſaid to be on an *everlaſting foundation*: and our Saviour § deſcribes him, as having *built his houſe upon the rock*, which, therefore, cannot be overthrown.

4thly, Obſerve, that the happineſs of a ſinful creature, or the pleaſure and advantages which he derives from his guilty conduct, reſt upon a very moveable and precarious foundation, and therefore cannot be of long continuance. Sin, and the enjoyment which it gives the ſinner, are the unnatural productions of falſehood and deceit. But it is impoſſible that this deceit ſhould be permitted to prevail for ever in the conſciences of men, or to give perpetual tranquillity, under the adminiſtration of a juſt and righteous God. Under his adminiſtration, every thing that is unnatural ſhall be deſtroyed, and tends, from the beginning, to its own deſtruction: and

† Prov. x. 25. § Matt. vii. 24.

every

every part of the creation, in ſpite of every artifice, will work itſelf at length into that ſtate which the Creator of the world intended for it. Flatteries and lies, and the arts of Satan *who deceives the world*, being altogether an unnatural foundation, on which to build the happineſs of a rational and moral agent, it muſt, therefore, at length, be undermined: and when this unnatural foundation fails, the ſinner muſt inevitably ſink into defenceleſs anguiſh and deſpair.

Our Saviour has ſet this matter in the ſtrongeſt light. * *This*, ſays he, is *the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* At the future judgment of the world, when the works of God ſhall be put into their final order and eſtabliſhment, light will

* John iii. 19.

conquer

conquer darkneſs, and truth will triumph over falſehood; in conſequence of which, the *evil deeds of men will be reproved*; being dragged from that obſcurity, in which they were concealed, by artifice and falſehood; they will appear before the conſcience of the ſinner, in all their baſeneſs and deformity; and hence his final condemnation and miſery will proceed.

5thly, Obſerve, that the enjoyment of a ſinner, in the courſe of a ſinful life, muſt not only, for the reaſon given, be of ſhort continuance, but ſucceeded alſo by the deepeſt anguiſh. Although no formal ſentence was to be pronounced againſt the wickedneſs of men, by the righteous Judge of all the earth; yet the conſcience of a ſinner, ſet free from the artifice and falſehood by which he was deceived, would cauſe him to condemn himſelf with inexpreſſible confuſion. To the puniſhment of his iniquity, nothing more is requiſite, than to ſtrip it of the falſe, artificial diſguiſe,

guiſe, under which it hid its own deformity, and to place it fairly in the view of his reflecting mind. In the caſe of our firſt parents, though God had interpoſed no poſitive exertion of his juſtice, yet as ſoon as they reflected calmly on their conduct, they could not miſs to feel a deep contrition and remorſe, from the conſciouſneſs of their ingratitude and baſeneſs, in tranſgreſſing the divine command: and, in like manner, every inſtance of iniquity which men commit, gradually tends, and will at length be followed by the ſame fatal conſequence. Our bleſſed Saviour hath ſolemnly forewarned us of this conſequence: † *I am come a light into the world, that whoſoever believeth on me ſhould not abide in darkneſs.—He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have ſpoken, the ſame ſhall judge him in the laſt day.* That is, the truths of God, publiſhed in the goſpel, when they

† John xii. 46.

ſhall

ſhall be placed before the conſcience of a ſinner, in all their evidence and moment, will riſe up in judgment, againſt the wickedneſs which he hath done, and force him to a final and eternal condemnation of himſelf.

6thly, Obſerve the thin partition which divides between the wickedneſs of men, and that future condemnation and remorſe which it will create in them, upon a calm and ſerious review; nothing but that laboured ignorance, and thoſe affected flatteries and lies by which the ſinner hides the *hatefulneſs of his iniquity* from himſelf. This is the whole of his defence; all that ſtands between him, and that mournful anguiſh and remorſe, which the conſtitution of his nature and the juſtice of his Maker have entailed upon the ſins of men. In the caſe of our firſt parents, how quick was the tranſition, from the flatteries and arts of Satan, to the anguiſh and aſtoniſhment that ſeized upon their guilty minds, after

they had tranſgreſſed the command of God. While they liſtened, and were yielding to the ſnare, they thought of nothing but of pleaſure and ſecurity, and of adding to the happineſs of their preſent ſtate; and very probably they enjoyed a momentary tranſport, when they taſted the beloved fruit. But no ſooner was the wickedneſs committed, than the momentary tranſport expired; and their confidence and joy were changed into confuſion and deſpair. Their caſe preſents us with a ſtrong example of the caſe of every ſinner who is flattered and enticed by the *deceitfulneſs of ſin*, compared with what is ſoon to be his caſe, when death ſhall chaſe away, for ever, theſe deceitful ſnares, and leave him quite defenceleſs and diſmayed; a prey to everlaſting anguiſh and remorſe. With great propriety, therefore, are the hopes of happineſs which the ſinner entertains, and the arts by which he keeps himſelf in peace, compared in ſcripture to the ſpider's web,

which

which indeed is artfully and finely wrought, but miſerably thin, and weak, which every the ſmalleſt accident is able to deſtroy.

7thly, Obſerve the unnatural ſtate of mind to which the ſinner is reduced, by the conſciouſneſs of guilt. He muſt not only baniſh from his ſight the truths of God, and put ſome ſpecious impoſture in their place, upon the deliberate commiſſion of every ſingle act of wickedneſs; but the whole plan and tenor of his life muſt be covered with a veil of darkneſs and diſguiſe. For his own tranquillity and comfort, he muſt exclude, as much as poſſibly he can, thoſe bleſſed truths, the ſight of which ſpreads light and joy throughout the reſt of the works of God. That this world was created by the power of God; that He who made this world governs it, in wiſdom, righteouſneſs, and goodneſs; that He is the friend and rewarder of the juſt, the enemy and puniſher of wickedneſs; that the ſoul of man was made for immortality,

and that Chriſt, the Son of God, has clearly brought this *life and immortality to light:* theſe joyful and ſalutary truths, he is deſirous to conceal, for ever, from himſelf, or to deſpiſe them, if he can, as the fictions of a credulous and deluded fancy. His comfort and ſecurity depends upon the ſad reverſe of theſe delightful truths. He is forced to fly for refuge to theſe dark and hideous proſpects, viz. that there is no God, no providence, no future ſtate, that no diſtinction ſhall be made between the righteous and the wicked, at the end of life; but that each of them ſhall ſink, for ever, into nothing. This is the unnatural and diſmal ſtate of mind to which he is reduced. *He loves darkneſs rather than the light:* he dares not come *into the light leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.*

8thly, Obſerve the unavoidable and intolerable nature of that future miſery which is to ſucceed to the pleaſures of a ſinful life. It muſt be unavoidable, for

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it will proceed immediately from the guilty man himself, and from the light and truth of God, forced into his mind, in spite of all his artificial darkness and disguise. In the language of the apostle †, When he shall say *peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh, as travail on a woman with child, and he shall not escape.* How can he escape? Or whither shall he fly from this internal misery? He may cry to the mountains and to the rocks to cover him, but they shall not be able to conceal his conscious wickedness, or screen him from the anguish which the sight of his iniquity shall awaken in his guilty soul.

In the same light, we may perceive the *intolerable* nature of this future misery. When calamity befalls an innocent and virtuous man, who has nothing in his own conduct to condemn, as the cause of his

† 1 Thess. v. 3.

calamity, he can recollect himſelf, and aſſemble all the fortitude and vigour of his mind, to ſupport him under it. This *the ſpirit of a man may bear.* But when one becomes the guilty author of his own calamity; then all the ſtrength and reſolution of his heart muſt fail, and the anguiſh which he ſuffers, muſt be deſtitute of every ſource of conſolation or ſupport. This is *the wounded ſpirit which none can bear.*

9thly, In the laſt place, we may obſerve, from the doctrine, as above explained, the deſperate madneſs, and depravity of ſcoffing at religion, or of making ſin the ſubject of our jeſt and laughter. *They are fools,* as Solomon expreſſes it, *who make a mock at ſin.* Such perſons are making *that* the ſubject of their jeſt, which will, ere long, prove the ſource of everlaſting anguiſh in their boſoms; and in truth preſent us with a more melancholy ſpectacle, than the ſight of a delirious captive ſporting with his chains; or of a condemned malefactor, laughing

laughing at the inſtruments of his approaching execution.

Theſe reflexions naturally ariſe from the ſubject of this diſcourſe. They claim your attention and regard; and every wiſe man *will lay them to his heart.* Let it be conſidered, that truth and falſehood, righteouſneſs and wickedneſs, and their different tendencies and iſſues, are unalterably fixed in nature, independent of the imaginations of men concerning them; and will not change their nature and effects by the artificial deceits whereby the ſinner now impoſes on himſelf. If then the doctrines of religion have given us a true account of the ſtate of things, as they are in nature, it muſt be of everlaſting conſequence to every man, to admit a juſt view and ſenſe of them into his mind. His higheſt wiſdom muſt conſiſt in the knowledge and belief of them: his virtue and perfection muſt conſiſt in his acting upon the influence of this knowledge and belief; and

from thence, his final happineſs and comfort muſt ariſe. Upon the other hand, the moſt deplorable ignorance and folly of a ſinner, lies in his ignorance or diſbelief of the doctrines of religion: his iniquity and guilt conſiſts in excluding the impreſſion of them from his heart, and from thence his future miſery muſt flow. The firſt of theſe was the ſtate of our firſt parents, prior to their eating of the forbidden tree, the laſt became their ſtate after their commiſſion of that fatal crime.

Sinners, for a while, may *flatter themſelves in their own eyes*, and preſumptuouſly deſpiſe the prudence and precaution of the man who feareth God. But how ſoon will their ideas be reverſed! The period is faſt approaching, when the hatefulneſs of their iniquity will be expoſed, and their contempt and hatred turned againſt themſelves: nay, when they ſhall feel a ſtrange aſtoniſhment, at the ſight of their own preſumptuouſneſs and folly, in rejecting the truths

truths of God.—When, at the voice of God, Noah, moved with fear, prepared the ark to ſave himſelf from the approaching deluge, no doubt the men of that licentious age held him in contempt, and laughed at the ſuppoſed credulity and folly of his conduct. But when the deluge came, and began to overwhelm them, with what horror and amazement would they be forced to ſee their own preſumptuouſneſs and folly, and to applaud the wiſdom and precaution of that holy man?—When Lot, warned by God of the approaching ruin of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, departed from them, to preſerve his life; we may, in like manner, believe, he was deſpiſed by the reſt of the inhabitants, as a credulous and ſimple man. But how ſoon would their contempt be turned againſt themſelves, and their laughter changed into horror and diſmay, when they ſaw the devouring flames deſcending from the clouds, and their cities all involved in the dreadful con-

conflagration! Such, we have reason to apprehend, will be the horror and amazement of the wicked, at the final judgment of the world.

DIS-

DISCOURSE V.

The Deceitfulneſs of Sin.

PSALMS xxxvi. 2.

He flattereth himſelf in his own eyes, till his iniquity be found to be hateful.

THE author of this pſalm, from the beginning of it to the fifth verſe, deſcribes the character and conduct of a wicked man. The firſt part of the deſcription is given in the preceding verſe, *There is no fear of God before his eyes*, that is, he has caſt off all reverence for God, in the conduct of his life. To this he adds, in the words of the text, *He flattereth himſelf in his*

own eyes: this is added by the pſalmiſt, as an explication of the firſt part of his deſcription, and as the circumſtance accounts for his having caſt off the fear of God. *For*, ſays the pſalmiſt, *he flattereth himſelf in his own eyes.*

The words of the text, viewed in this connexion, ſuggeſt the following obſervation; that the way by which a ſinner is enabled to diſmiſs the fear of God, and thereby to harden himſelf in his iniquity, is, the flattering himſelf in his own eyes.

By this flattery of himſelf, we are to underſtand, thoſe artificial deceits which the ſinner impoſes on himſelf, and whereby he entertains the expectation of impunity and ſafety, in the commiſſion of his wickedneſs. He thus flatters himſelf, *till the hatefulneſs of his iniquity be found.* Iniquity is hateful in its own nature, and fatal in its conſequences, therefore the ſinner muſt diſguiſe its hatefulneſs, and hide its conſequences from himſelf, ere he can live in the

the commiſſion of it, with any tolerable meaſure of tranquillity.

The deceits by which the ſinner thus impoſes on himſelf, may be very different and various, according to the circumſtances and the diſpoſitions of the perſons by whom they are admitted, and it is not very eaſy to diſcover every one of them. There are, however, ſome capital and leading ones, pointed out in holy ſcripture, or ſuggeſted by the hiſtory and experience of the world. Theſe I have propoſed to mention, and to put you on your guard againſt, in the following diſcourſe.

1. The firſt inſtance of this kind which I ſhall take notice of, is a ſtudied infidelity, and an affected endeavour to deſpiſe the evidence on which the belief of the great and fundamental doctrines of religion ſtands; ſuch as the exiſtence and perfections of Almighty God, his moral government of this world, and a future judgment. In all ages of the world, ſinners have

have employed their deepeſt artifice and ſkill, to weaken the evidence of theſe important truths, with a view to preſerve their quiet, in the practice of iniquity. The perſons who are under the influence of this deceit, are deſcribed by the prophet Iſaiah, in the following manner: * *They call evil good, and good evil; they put darkneſs for light, and light for darkneſs; bitter for ſweet, and ſweet for bitter.* They are deſcribed by the Pſalmiſt, as ſaying, ‡ *How doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Moſt High? God hath forgotten, He will never ſee it.*

It is not propoſed, at preſent, to inquire into the force of the evidence which God has given us of the truth of theſe great and fundamental doctrines of religion. It will be ſufficient to anſwer the purpoſe of this diſcourſe, to make the two following remarks.

* Iſaiah v. 20. ‡ Pſ. lxxiii. 11.

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1ſt, That it is the height of folly, either to reject theſe doctrines of religion, or to treat them with contempt, until we can ſay, we have examined the evidence on which they have been received, with the utmoſt exactneſs and candour in our power. On the one hand, if theſe doctrines ſhall be found to be the truths of God, the conſequences of a ſinful life muſt be for ever fatal. If, on the other hand, we ſhould happen to be deceived in the belief of them, no hurtful conſequence, however, can enſue. This remark is not made, to prove the truth of the doctrines of religion, but to prove the folly and preſumption of the ſinner, when they are rejected or deſpiſed by him at random, on no examination, or a ſlight examination, or, indeed, on any leſs evidence, than ſuch as irreſiſtibly forces him to a conviction of their falſehood.

In all other caſes, where men's intereſts are concerned, *he* would certainly be deem-

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ed a fool, who proceeded with the ſame degree of raſhneſs and preſumption, which the ſinner ſhews with reſpect to his eternal intereſt. This leads to the

2d Obſervation; That without determining the degree of evidence, which is offered in ſupport of the doctrines of religion, we may venture, nevertheleſs, to affirm, with ſtrong aſſurance, that it is at leaſt equal to the evidence, upon which men conſtantly proceed, without the ſmalleſt heſitation, in all their other intereſts. Let a man candidly compare the evidence, which is given in ſupport of the great principles of religion, with that evidence by which he is determined, when he conſults his temporal proſperity, or guards againſt the dangers to which it is expoſed; and he will not heſitate a moment, to declare in favour of the wiſdom of a religious life. We may therefore ſafely put the matter on this iſſue, that if a man had as much evidence of the dangerous

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and hurtful tendency of any meaſure, in the conduct of his temporal affairs, (whatever preſent intereſt or pleaſure it might procure) as is given to convince him, that a ſinful life will be fatal to his everlaſting intereſt, he would be deemed an egregious fool by all the world, if that meaſure was adopted by him.

Perſons of the character, whereof we are now ſpeaking, are ready to contend, that the arguments in favour of religion, are built upon uncertain proſpects of futurity; that they refer to objects which are diſtant, and inviſible, and wherein (it is thought) we may be eaſily deceived.—But do not all the projects of this life proceed upon proſpects of futurity? Is there any important buſineſs, or tranſaction, upon earth, in which men don't reſign ſome preſent intereſt, or pleaſure, in the hope of ſome ſuperiour intereſt, or pleaſure, that is future and inviſible. The ſtateſman, the ſoldier, the merchant, the artificer; every man,

who is employed in the buſineſs of life, reſigns ſome portion of his preſent eaſe, and liberty, and of his preſent intereſt, or pleaſure, in purſuit of ſomething future, and inviſible.—Let a wiſe man conſider, if in any one of his purſuits, he has greater aſſurance of the conſequence and iſſue of his conduct, than God has given him of the oppoſite effects of a religious and ſinful life.

It is true, we have no example, or experience, of the conſequences of men's conduct in a future life, as we have of the conſequences of their conduct in this preſent life; and therefore the arguments, which are offered with relation to the firſt of theſe, do not ſtrike the ſenſes and imagination with an equal force. It ought, nevertheleſs, to be conſidered, whether the evidence, which hath been given, of a future judgment, and eternal world, from reaſon and conſcience, from the order and adminiſtration of Divine Providence, and

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from the revelation of the goſpel, will not appear to be of equal ſtrength, when it is calmly and impartially attended to, though it is not accompanied with the experience, and examples, which we have in our temporal affairs; and whether, if a man is not determined by this evidence, he would be determined in his conduct by it, although one, riſing from the dead, ſhould atteſt its truth upon his perſonal experience. On this view of the matter, our Saviour makes Abraham, in the parable *, affirm, *that if the rich man's brethren would not believe Moſes and the prophets, neither would they believe, though one ſhould riſe from the dead.*

2, Another inſtance of deceit, by which ſinners ſeem to flatter, and impoſe upon themſelves, is a fond imagination of their own innocence, even in the courſe of an irregular and ſinful life. They artfully perſuade themſelves, that there cannot be ſuch malignity or guilt in what they do, as

* Luke xvi. 31.

that it ſhould expoſe them to the diſpleaſure of their Maker, or draw after it any great or laſting puniſhment: they preſume, therefore, God will overlook the irregularities and errors of their lives, or find out ſome merciful expedient, whereby they may eſcape with ſafety and ſucceſs.

This inſtance of deceit is uſually ſupported in the minds of men, by ſome apparent circumſtances of alleviation or excuſe; ſuch as the ſtrength of the temptation, by which they were ſeduced, the weakneſs of the nature God hath given them, the violence of paſſion, the force of cuſtom, example, and the like. The Pſalmiſt ſeems to point at this ſpecies of deceit, when he repreſents the Almighty as admoniſhing the wicked in the following manner. * *Theſe things thou haſt done, and I kept ſilence: thou thoughteſt I was altogether ſuch a one as thyſelf*; that is, that I had the ſame idea of thy guilt, with which thou hadſt flattered and deceived thyſelf. Therefore, (the

* Pſ. l. 21.

Almighty

Almighty adds) *I will reprove thee, and ſet them* (viz. the things which thou haſt done) *in order before thee.*

Probably ſome flattering inſinuation of this nature was ſuggeſted to the minds of our firſt parents, when they ventured to tranſgreſs the divine command. In the deſcription, which is given of their tranſgreſſion, it is ſaid *, *That the woman, when ſhe ſaw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleaſant to the eyes, and a tree to be deſired to make one wiſe, took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave alſo to her huſband.* She imagined it would ſeem, that the eating of a tree, which was good for food, pleaſant to the eyes, and fit to make one wiſe, could not be ſo criminal a thing, or ſo hurtful in its conſequence, as ſhe had hitherto believed; therefore ſhe did eat of it, and her huſband with her. By a like inſinuating ſnare, are their ignorant poſterity, to this preſent day, corrupted and

* Gen. iii. 6.

deſtroyed. Hence it is that ſinners ſpeak with ſo much confidence, of their irregular and ſinful lives, and repreſent the ſins they have committed as innocent, or excuſable infirmities, which cannot merit any high diſpleaſure from almighty God, or draw any very hurtful conſequences from the juſtice of his government.

To put men upon their guard againſt this inſtance of deceit, let the two following obſervations be attended to:

1ſt, That notwithſtanding the ignorance and corruption of our preſent ſtate, ſo much of our original rectitude remains, that without any laboured cultivation, the conſciences of men do ſtill perceive a very odious deformity in ſome inſtances of wickedneſs; and lead, not only to a ſtrong indignation againſt the criminal, but to a ſtrong perſuaſion, that Providence will ſome time or other interpoſe, and exert its juſtice, in his puniſhment. In the caſe, for inſtance, of unprovoked, malicious cruelty,

cruelty, or when a man wickedly betrays his friend, his father, or his country; or commits ſome atrocious act of oppreſſion, ingratitude, or inſolence; every man, except the criminal himſelf, and the aſſociates of his crime, would feel the height of indignation, and a ſtrong demand, that God ſhould interpoſe the marks of his diſpleaſure. It therefore, certainly, deſerves our moſt ſerious conſideration, if any ſin committed againſt the government of God; *of that God*, who is infinitely great and good; the origin of all our happineſs, and the foundation of all our hopes; does not imply in it, ſuch a degree of guilt as ought to raiſe a like indignation in our breaſts, and a like expectation from the hand of God; and if it be not owing to an unnatural darkneſs and depravity, that any voluntary violation of the holy laws and ſtatutes of Jehovah's kingdom, appears to us to be an inconſiderable guilt, which, we therefore hope, may be committed with impunity.

The three following circumſtances, which every man may be able to obſerve, make what we have now ſuppoſed extremely probable.

1. That the moſt immoral and abandoned ſinner, ſeems not fully to perceive his own deformity, or the horror of his crimes; nay, he juſtifies himſelf, and conceals the baſeneſs of his guilty conduct, under ſome ſpecious form of innocence.

2. That when a ſinner is converted to the path of holineſs and virtue, and the diſpoſitions of his heart are changed, he immediately perceives the deformity and hatefulneſs, not only of the moſt atrocious immoralities, but even of thoſe which paſs in the general eſtimation of the world, and paſſed with himſelf before, as very pardonable faults, if not as things entirely innocent.

3. That in proportion to the progreſs and improvement of the heart in piety and holineſs, the deformity and baſeneſs of a

ſinful

ſinful life, and the oppoſite importance and excellence of holineſs, becomes more and more affecting and remarkable.

Theſe circumſtances render it extremely probable, (even in the way of preſent obſervation and experience) that when ſinners come to ſee themſelves, and the iniquities which they have done, in their true and proper light, their ideas of them will be totally reverſed.

To put men further on their guard againſt the inſtance of deceit, of which we are now ſpeaking, let us conſider,

2dly, The marks which God has already given, in the adminiſtration of his providence, of his diſpleaſure with the ſins of men. I might here obſerve, that all the miſeries of human life, from the apoſtacy of Adam to this preſent day, are to be conſidered as the tokens of divine diſpleaſure with the ſins of men; or as the natural or appointed conſequences of their guilt, which never had appeared had men remained

remained in innocence. But what I would chiefly have you to obſerve, on this head of the diſcourſe, is, that we ſee many ſpecial inſtances of miſery ariſing from the nature of wickedneſs itſelf; which therefore ſeem to be inflicted by the providence of God, as ſo many ſpecial marks of his diſpleaſure with the ſins of men, and as preludes to their final conſequences under his adminiſtration.

What extreme diſtreſs have ſome brought upon themſelves by their intemperance; ſome by their diſhoneſty, and others by their immoderate ambition. To inſtance, in the firſt of theſe; beſides the loſs of the higheſt and beſt of all enjoyments, ariſing from the exerciſe of piety, humanity, friendſhip, and the teſtimony of an approving conſcience, by their intemperance men bring upon themſelves ſickneſs and diſeaſe, infamy, indigence, remorſe, and, ſometimes, a diſhonourable and miſerable death; and theſe are the moſt terrible cala-

mities

mities to which our nature is expoſed. If then the diſpleaſure of the Almighty, with the ſins of men, appears in ſuch remarkable effects, even in this preſent life, which is the period of his long-ſuffering and patience, wherein men are in their ſtate of trial and probation; what greater effects of his diſpleaſure have we cauſe to apprehend, in that future period of his providence, wherein the exerciſe of his impartial juſtice, is to ſucceed the exerciſe of his deſpiſed forbearance; and where every man is to *receive according to his works?*

It adds greatly to the weight of this conſideration, that theſe expreſſions of divine diſpleaſure are made againſt ſuch iniquities as do not imply that enormous height of guilt, which is confeſſed in ſome atrocious inſtances of human wickedneſs; in perjury, perfidiouſneſs, murder, and the like; but againſt ſuch as are uſually diſguiſed in the thoughts of men, under the appearance of innocence, or weakneſs; as being

being only a compliance with the appetites implanted in our nature, and with the cuſtom of the world, in which a man has no deliberate impiety and malice in his heart, no intention either to affront his Maker, or to hurt his fellow-men. There are even many inſtances of men's involving themſelves in much diſtreſs, by mere precipitancy and want of thought; by ſlighting the opportunities of happineſs, which Providence had given them. In this way they have been involved in poverty, contempt, anguiſh, and remorſe, out of which they were never able, afterwards, to extricate themſelves. Does not all this give us cauſe to apprehend, that after men have ſpent their lives in the purſuit of vain, intemperate, or brutal pleaſures, with a total forgetfulneſs of God, and a total inattention to the improvement of their ſouls; after, through the whole progreſs of their lives, they have ſlighted many noble opportunities of becoming wiſe, virtuous, and happy,

happy, and rejected many calls and admonitions from the providence of God and the goſpel of his Son; that after all this, very dreadful conſequences will enſue, in ſome future period of their being?

Add to thoſe conſiderations, which are ſuggeſted by the conſciences of men and the providence of God, the ſolemn admonitions of the danger and demerit of a ſinful life, that are given in the revelation of the goſpel. If we really believe the truth of the Chriſtian revelation, it is the moſt amazing folly and preſumption to believe, that the ſins of men are trivial or harmleſs things, and that by any kind of evaſion or apology ſinners ſhall be able to eſcape from future puniſhment. In this revelation, § *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men*; and aſſurance is given in the ſtrongeſt terms, ‡ that *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh, ſhall be on every ſoul*

§ Rom. i. 18. ‡ Rom. ii. 8.

of

of man that doeth evil. After theſe ſolemn admonitions; to defend or extenuate the ſins of men, by the apologies which ſinners plead in their own behalf, is in effect to ſay, that we are wiſer than God, and that we know better than himſelf, the laws and conſtitution of his moral kingdom. God hath ſaid, that *ſin is an evil and bitter thing*, and that ſinners ſhall be the authors of their own deſtruction. But the ſinner ſaith, it is no ſuch evil thing, and that no ſuch hurtful conſequence from it ſhall enſue. It was thus, in the original ſin of our firſt parents; God had ſaid to them, *In the day ye eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, ye ſhall ſurely die.* But Satan ſaid, there is no ſuch danger in tranſgreſſing this command; *in the day ye eat thereof ye ſhall not ſurely die:* truſting to his flatteries and lies they were deceived to their deſtruction.

3dly, Another inſtance of deceit by which ſinners flatter themſelves in their own

own eyes, and are drawn into deſtruction, is a groundleſs and preſumptuous dependance on the mercy of Almighty God. When ſinners are not able to reject the great and fundamental doctrines of religion, when they are forced to own the danger and demerit of a ſinful life, their next reſource and refuge is the mercy of their Maker. This mercy they believe, and every one acknowledges, is infinite; they therefore expect to be within the reach of it. This, it is probable, is one of the moſt common and prevailing inſtances of thoſe deceits, whereby ſinners impoſe upon themſelves, and are hardened to their own deſtruction. It is uſually found, that the worſt of men, on the approach of death, flatter and ſupport themſelves by this imagination. To put men upon their guard againſt this dangerous deceit, let the following conſiderations be attended to.

1ſt, That although the mercy of Almighty God be infinite, as all his other perfections

perfections are, yet it can extend only to thoſe perſons who are the proper objects of compaſſion, and to thoſe caſes to which it would be worthy of him to extend his mercy. But from the moſt expreſs aſſurances from God himſelf, given partly by the ſecret intimations of our own conſciences, and more fully by the goſpel of his ſon, ſinners who continue in their ſinful courſes to the end of life, are not the proper objects of his mercy; their caſe does not fall within the reach even of that compaſſion which is infinite, no more than that which, in the very idea of it, implies a contradiction, comes within the reach of his omnipotence.

2d, Let it be obſerved, that abſtracting from the diſpleaſure of Almighty God, and ſuppoſing that there was to be no poſitive exertion of his juſtice in the caſe, yet the future puniſhment of ſinners will very probably proceed from the nature and influence of wickedneſs itſelf. In many

paſſages

paſſages of ſcripture we are led to this conception of the matter; and it is agreeable to what we already ſee in the divine adminiſtration.

The apoſtle Paul declares, that future happineſs or miſery will proceed from a religious or ſinful life, in the ſame manner that the fruits of harveſt proceed from the ſeed which hath been ſown in Spring. § *Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap. He that ſoweth to the fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption, and he that ſoweth to the ſpirit, ſhall of the ſpirit reap eternal life.* Thus too, the wiſe King, in the book of Proverbs, † *Sinners ſhall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.* In like manner, the prophet Iſaiah, ‡ *Say ye to the righteous it ſhall be well with him, for they ſhall eat the fruit of their own doings. Wo to the wicked, it ſhall be ill with them, for the reward of his hands ſhall be given him.*

§ Gal. vi. 7. † Prov. i. 31. ‡ Iſa. iii. 10.

Agreeable to theſe repreſentations of ſcripture, are the preſent appearances in providence. Vice has a natural tendency to produce unhappineſs and miſery, the greateſt indeed incident to human nature. Many ſad inſtances of this occur in the experience of life; and when the caſe happens to be otherwiſe, it is owing to ſome foreign accidental cauſe, which, for a while, ſuſpends or retards its native tendency. If then, the ſame order which we ſee at preſent in the works of God, ſhall be continued in a future ſtate, and if thoſe external accidents, which ſometimes interrupt or retard its influence on earth, ſhall be removed, (and this we muſt believe will be the caſe on our removal from this world) vice muſt unavoidably create its own puniſhment and miſery; and in ſuch a manner, as will totally deſtroy all confidence or hope in the mercy of Almighty God.

No

No man ever thought he might depend upon the mercy of his Maker when he brings diſtreſs upon himſelf by his own miſconduct, or that his infinite compaſſion ſhould lead him, either to prevent or to remove thoſe miſeries of life, which by the eſtabliſhed laws of Providence are entailed upon the ſins of men. Who ever thought, for inſtance, that the mercy of God ſhould interpoſe, to prevent the weakneſs and diſeaſe which the intemperate man brings upon himſelf by his intemperance; or the diſcredit and diſgrace which the diſhoneſt man brings upon himſelf by his diſhoneſty; or in any other caſe, to prevent the unhappy conſequences which ariſe from the wickedneſs of men, by the eſtabliſhed order of his providence? We have as little, or leſs reaſon to believe that his mercy will lead him to interpoſe, at the iſſue of a guilty life, to break the natural and eſtabliſhed order of his works, with a view to ſave the ſin-

ner from the final conſequences of his wickedneſs.

The whole of this dependance on divine mercy, proceeds on a conception of it, which is altogether falſe, and contradicted in the ſtrongeſt manner, by what we already meet with in the courſe of providence. Sinners form an idea of his mercy, as if it were a diſpoſition in his nature to prevent or to remedy the miſeries of his creatures, in every circumſtance and in all events. But it is not ſuch an undiſtinguiſhing or undirected impulſe. It is the calm determination of his nature, to prevent, or to remove the miſery of his creatures, in ſuch caſes and by ſuch meaſures only, as by his wiſdom he knows to be conſiſtent with the general happineſs and order of his works. Of this we have the ſtrongeſt indications, even in the preſent courſe of providence. Innumerable miſeries are incident to human creatures, in their

their paſſage through this world; and in theſe, the eſtabliſhed laws and order of his providence take place and operate their full effects; and no man expects that God ſhould interpoſe to interrupt this eſtabliſhed courſe, in order to prevent or to remove theſe miſeries of his creatures.

4th, Allied to the preceding inſtance of deceit, is the ſinner's hoping, at the end of a guilty life, to be ſaved, by the merit of the Son of God, and the virtue of that great atonement which he made for the ſins of men. If the Sinner is not able to convince himſelf that the mercy of his Maker is ſufficient, by itſelf, to enſure his future ſafety; he truſts, at leaſt, to the all-ſufficient ſacrifice and merit of his well-beloved ſon.

It is needleſs to ſay much in order to expoſe the abſurdity of this deceit. Did men look into the holy ſcriptures with any tolerable meaſure of attention, they would undoubtedly perceive, that *they* only can

be ſaved by the ſacrifice and interceſſion of the Son of God, who are perſuaded by him to repent of their iniquities, to believe and obey the goſpel. He is exalted * as *a prince and Saviour, to give repentance and remiſſion of ſins. He is* † *the author of ſalvation to them who obey him.* § *We muſt repent, and be converted, that our ſins may be blotted out.* It is by a ‡ *patient continuance in doing well*, that we are directed *to ſeek for glory, honour, and immortality*; whilſt they who *obey not the truth*, but obey unrighteouſneſs, are directed to look for *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh.*

This being the eſtabliſhed plan, upon which we are to expect redemption through the merits of the Son of God, it follows, in the cleareſt manner, that ſinners, continuing in a courſe of ſin, have as little reaſon to depend upon theſe merits, or to expect ſalvation by their means, as they have

* Acts v. 31. † Heb. v. 9.
§ Acts iii. 19. ‡ Rom. ii. 6.

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to depend upon the infinite extent of the divine compaſſion. Were the matter otherwiſe, were ſinners, continuing in their wickedneſs, permitted to expect ſalvation through the merits of our Saviour, Jeſus would become the *miniſter of ſin*, an eſtabliſher rather than a deſtroyer of the works of Satan; than which, a more blaſphemous reproach could not be thrown upon his character.

To what hath been obſerved on this head, it ought to be ſubjoined, that in the nature of the thing it is impoſſible for the ſinner to be happy, but in the way which the goſpel hath preſcribed, viz. by repentance and the reformation of his life, and by the faith of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt *purifying his heart*. As long as ſin maintains its dominion in the heart of man, it will of itſelf operate his puniſhment and miſery. It is the diſeaſe and diſtemper of the ſoul, which muſt either be expelled, or end in its deſtruction. Should we therefore put the

caſe, that a ſinner might obtain indemnity and pardon, by the ſacrifice and merit of the Son of God, yet ſin would be the cauſe of his deſtruction: in the ſame manner that a criminal muſt ſuffer for his crime, although he ſhould eſcape the hand of public juſtice, if by his wickedneſs he has brought upon himſelf an incurable diſeaſe. The redemption of a ſinner by the Lord Jeſus Chriſt does not merely ſignify his redemption from the puniſhment which is due to his iniquity, but likewiſe from the power of iniquity itſelf: the Redeemer does not only ſave him from the condemning ſentence of the law, but withal purifies his heart, and expells that internal corruption and depravity, which of itſelf would be the ſource of future miſery.

5th, Another inſtance of deceit, by which the ſinner flatters himſelf in his own eyes, is a precipitant contempt of religion, on account of the weak and wrong repreſentations which have been made of it,

by

by ſome of its miſtaken friends. When the mind of man is once corrupted and ſeduced by the deceitfulneſs of ſin, it fondly graſps at every thing, whereby it may juſtify its own corruption. When therefore the ſinner is not able to diſown the force of what is offered, to prove the wiſdom and importance of a religious life, he ſtrives to juſtify himſelf in the neglect of it, from the weakneſs and folly of its friends. Abſurd, even ridiculous deſcriptions of religion, have been ſometimes given by its ignorant and miſtaken friends: and many, who appear to be religious, appear not however to become, by the influence of their religion, either wiſer and happier in themſelves, or more agreeable and uſeful members of ſociety; nay, oftentimes by fanatical, and wrong conceptions of religion, the peace and order of ſociety have been miſerably diſturbed. Hence ſome perſons have been fond to draw the raſh concluſion, that all religion is a groundleſs and imaginary thing,

thing, without any rational, ſolid foundation to ſupport it.

This inſtance of deceit unhappily prevails, even among thoſe who pretend to ſuperiour diſcernment. But the weakneſs of it may appear upon a very ſmall attention. The amount of it is only this, that, becauſe religion, in its counterfeits, and by a wrong repreſentation of its nature and effects, appears to be an imaginary thing, we may therefore deſpiſe the thing itſelf, without attending to its genuine nature and importance. Does a wiſe man conduct himſelf in this manner, in any other action of his life? Does he deſpiſe the truth and uſefulneſs of real ſcience, becauſe of the impertinence and pedantry of mere pretenders to it? Does he deſpiſe the uſeful ſchemes of commerce, accompanied with the ſolideſt effects, becauſe of the chimerical and idle ſchemes of mere projectors? Why then ſhould a wiſe man conclude againſt the excellence and wiſdom of religion

gion, from the miſrepreſentations, either of its hypocritical, or miſtaken friends, and thus take the ſhadow for the ſubſtance of the thing itſelf? Shall the love of God, begetting in the ſoul a love to every thing that is godlike and divine; ſhall the faith of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, begetting in the ſoul a reſemblance of the amiable virtues of his character, and a vigorous purſuit of the *life and immortality, which he hath brought to light*; ſhall theſe, or any other part of pure and *undefiled religion*, be deemed imaginary or uſeleſs things, becauſe of the hypocriſy, or folly, of thoſe who pretend to be its friends, or becauſe theſe excellent effects have not appeared, either in the deſcriptions, or examples, they have given of it?

If men were wiſe, they would not, in this manner, ſuffer themſelves to be deceived. The true underſtanding and wiſdom of a man conſiſts in this; that in every thing, where his intereſt is concerned, he forms his judgment according to the real

nature

nature and circumſtances of the caſe; diſtinguiſhing, in every matter, what is natural, genuine, and excellent; from what is falſe, worthleſs, or unnatural. Whatever air of wiſdom, and ſuperiour underſtanding, therefore, men may give themſelves, it is owing, at bottom, to narrowneſs of thought, or to great raſhneſs and precipitance, that they have not learned to diſtinguiſh genuine, and true religion, from its counterfeits, and to judge of its real wiſdom and importance, from its own nature and effects, as they are exhibited before us in the laws of God, and the goſpel of his Son.

6th, I ſhall take notice only of one other inſtance of the ſelf-flattering deceit, whereby ſinners are enticed, and drawn into deſtruction; and it is their hoping and reſolving to repent, and turn to God, at ſome future and more convenient opportunity; at the fartheſt, in the laſt period of their lives, or at the approach of death. When all the former

former inſtances of ſelf-deceit are unable to fortify the ſinner, and ſilence the clamours of his conſcience, this is uſually his laſt reſource. Being forced to ſee the indiſpenſable importance of a religious life, but unwilling to reſign the preſent intereſts and pleaſures of his ſinful courſe, he therefore flatters himſelf with the hope, that after he has enjoyed theſe intereſts and pleaſures for a while, he ſhall be able to obtain forgiveneſs from God, by his penitence and prayers, at ſome future opportunity, were it even at the laſt period of his life.

It is not propoſed, at preſent, to ſhew the extreme abſurdity and folly of this conduct, from the arguments uſually offered on the ſubject, drawn from the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of human life; the hardening influence of a ſinful courſe, which gradually weakens, and at length deſtroys the ſenſibility of the human conſcience, rendering a man's return to a religious life more and more improbable and difficult;

or

or from the danger of being totally abandoned by the providence and grace of God, and given up to a judicial blindneſs and inſenſibility; arguments which, to every thinking perſon, muſt appear of irreſiſtible importance. I would only deſire your attention to the prodigious preſumption of the ſinner, who defers his repentance, and return to God, to the laſt period of his life, or the immediate approach of death; hoping, then, to obtain forgiveneſs from God, and admiſſion to eternal life, by his penitence and prayers. Againſt this deceit, men ſhould be put upon their guard in a ſpecial manner, becauſe it is extremely common; examples of it occurring every day.

What God has done for ſinners, even in the laſt moments of their lives, in ſome ſingular ſituations of his providence, or what he may ſtill ſee proper to be done on ſimilar occaſions, it becometh not us to ſay, nor is it needful to determine. But it appears

appears in the cleareſt light, from the whole tenor of the goſpel, that the method by which we are directed to expect forgiveneſs from God, and an entrance to eternal life, through Jeſus Chriſt, is not any ſudden, tranſitory act of mind, nor any ſudden (however fervent) application to his mercy, by our prayers at the laſt period of life; but theſe, exerted in, and ſucceeded by the tenour of a religious and holy converſation. We are directed to *ſeek for glory, honour, and immortality* *, *by a patient continuance in doing well.* We are taught † *to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, whilſt we look for the bleſſed hope, and glorious appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt:* to add to ‡ *our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godlineſs, brotherly-kindneſs, and charity,* in the hope of an abundant entrance into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt: and, § *in all holy converſation*

* Rom. ii. 7. † Tit. ii. 12. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 6. § 2 Pet. iii. 11.

and

and godlineſs, to look for, and haſte unto, the coming of the day of God.

The above paſſages of ſcripture, and many others which might be quoted to the ſame effect, point out the ordinary eſtabliſhed order of his grace. This indeed appears to be as much the eſtabliſhed order of his grace, as it is the eſtabliſhed order of his providence, that in the proſecution of our temporal affairs, we muſt obſerve thoſe conditions on which he hath ſuſpended our ſucceſs: that, for inſtance, the huſbandman muſt ſow in ſpring, if he would reap in harveſt: that, in the earlier years of life, a young perſon muſt ſubmit to the rules of education, if he would be qualified for the buſineſs and ſatisfactions of maturer age; or that, in any other caſe, to obtain the end in view, we muſt obſerve the means, which the order of Providence preſcribes.

What the Creator can do, or what he may have done, independent of the eſtabliſhed laws of providence, no man reckons

it of importance to inquire; and any perſon would be deemed a madman or a fool, who directed the meaſures of his conduct by a regard to ſuch unuſual departures from theſe laws, as the hiſtory of the world may poſſibly furniſh ſome few examples of. That man ſeems equally fooliſh and abſurd who ſeeks admiſſion to eternal life, otherwiſe than according to the meaſures of his mercy, declared and eſtabliſhed by the goſpel.

I have thus endeavoured to point out the moſt hurtful and prevailing inſtances of thoſe deceits whereby ſinners *flatter themſelves in their own eyes, till their iniquity be found to be hateful.*

In what hath been delivered, you may obſerve, that ſuch inſtances only have been mentioned, as have an influence upon the whole conduct of a ſinner's life, whatever may be the particular ſpecies of wickedneſs to which he is attached, or by whatever ſpecial motives and temptations he is

directed in his conduct. In order, therefore, to complete the ſubject, it may be proper to add the following obſervation: that beſides theſe general enticements and deceits, every particular ſpecies of iniquity has its peculiar artifice and ſnare, and ſome ſpecial colour and diſguiſe under which it hides its own deformity and guilt. Seldom or never does the ſinner ſee his own favourite purſuit, in its genuine and real character. He deſcribes it in his own imagination, under the appearance of ſome innocent or laudable purſuit, to which it bears ſome reſemblance or affinity. The cruelty of Joſeph's brethren, when they ſold him to the Iſmaelites †, was concealed in their imaginations, by the thin pretence of their not *laying their hands upon the child.* § When Corah, Dathan and Abiram, rebelled againſt the miniſtry of Moſes and Aaron, it was under the plauſible pretence of reſtraining their exceſſive power, and

† Gen. xxxvii. 27. § Numb. xvi. 3.

becauſe

becauſe *they took too much upon them, ſince all the congregation were holy every one of them.* David's ‡ guilt, in the murder of Uriah, was concealed under the pretence of commanding him to fight *in the hotteſt of the battle.*

In like manner, every ſinful paſſion and purſuit conceals its own deformity and guilt. The covetous and ſelfiſh miſer, whoſe heart and hands are ſhut againſt every amiable office of humanity, obſerveth not his own ſelfiſhneſs and avarice. In his idea of himſelf, he is no farther attached to his own intereſt, than what the rules of prudence and frugality preſcribe. The proud and haughty man is not conſcious of his own haughtineſs and pride; he has only a juſt eſteem and value for himſelf, and a ſuitable regard for his own honour and importance in ſociety. Immoderate anger and revenge aſſumes the appearance of a neceſſary ſelf-defence, or a laudable

‡ 2 Sam. xi. 14.

indignation againſt what is wrong. A neglect or contempt of the ſacred inſtitutions of religion, is a liberal and manly freedom from the reſtraints of vulgar ſuperſtition or hypocriſy.

From theſe remarks, we may perceive the danger men are in of flattering themſelves in their own eyes, not only by thoſe general apologies which are pleaded in behalf of every ſinful courſe of life, and whereby ſinners of every denomination are apt to impoſe upon themſelves; but likewiſe from thoſe ſpecial apologies which every particular kind or inſtance of iniquity is apt to plead in its defence. Until then, a man has acquired ſo much wiſdom and integrity, as to make his own character and ſtate of mind the ſubject of a calm and impartial review; until, placing himſelf in the ſituation of an unintereſted ſpectator, he has learned to give to every movement and affection of his heart, and to every meaſure of his life, its genuine character

and

and name, he will inevitably *flatter himſelf in his own eyes.*

It may be proper to conclude with the following remark; that the deceits whereby ſinners flatter themſelves in their own eyes, are but temporary expedients, of which they cannot long avail themſelves. It is only *till their iniquity be found to be hateful.* If iniquity, in its nature, and in the ſight of God, be a hateful thing, its hatefulneſs muſt be at length expoſed, and placed before the conſcience of the ſinner, in ſpite of all his flatteries and lies. This we muſt expect from the righteouſneſs and wiſdom of the great Creator of the world. When the meaſures of divine adminiſtration ſhall be brought to that order and eſtabliſhment wherein they are to remain for ever, we muſt believe that every rational and moral ſubject of Jehovah's kingdom, will be brought to ſee, without any remaining error or diſguiſe, the true and real ſtate of things, as they are in na-

ture, and that from this diſcovery his final happineſs or miſery will proceed. When by this diſcovery the hatefulneſs of iniquity is found, the deepeſt anguiſh and remorſe muſt be immediately awakened in the conſcience of a ſinner, in ſpite of all the flatteries and lies, by which he kept himſelf in quiet, in his progreſs through this world. At this enlightening and deciſive period, theſe flatteries and lies will fly before the *light and truth* of God, and leave him in a ſtrange amazement at the ſight of his own deformity and hatefulneſs.

DISCOURSE VI.

The Character of the Upright Man.

ISAIAH xxvi. 7.

The Path of the Juſt is Uprightneſs.

IN the language of ſcripture, juſtice frequently comprehends the whole extent and compaſs of our duty; and the juſt man is he who has an impartial regard to every part of it. In this extenſive ſenſe the word is uſed in the verſe now read: *The path of the juſt is uprightneſs.* By the *path* of the juſt, we are to underſtand the conduct of his life, not excluſive of, but as it proceeds from the juſtice and uprightneſs of

his heart; and the ſenſe of the prophet, in the text, is, that the whole of the juſt man's character may be ſummed up in this; that he lives in the practice of uprightneſs. In many other paſſages of ſcripture, the word muſt be underſtood in the ſame extenſive ſenſe; and the righteous, or the good man, on whom God hath promiſed to beſtow the bleſſings of his goodneſs, is therefore called the upright man, or the man that walks uprightly. Thus the Pſalmiſt *, *mark the perfect, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.* † *Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart.* ‡ *The Lord is a ſun and ſhield; He will give grace and glory, and will withhold no good from them that walk uprightly.*

In the following diſcourſe it is propoſed, to inquire into the nature and extent of this uprightneſs, and to mark its influence upon the heart and life of the juſt man; from whence it will appear, with what propriety

* Pſ. xxxvii. 3. † Pſ. xcvii. 11. ‡ Pſ. lxxxiv. 11.

the

the whole of his character may be reſolved into uprightneſs.

The word is ſometimes uſed in ſcripture to denote only one particular branch of the juſt man's character, viz. the ſincerity of his profeſſions and tranſactions with his fellow-men. In this reſtricted ſenſe it is plainly uſed by the apoſtle Paul: * *When I ſaw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the goſpel*, i. e. agreeable to the candour and ſincerity which the goſpel hath preſcribed, by concealing their belief, that the obligations of the ceremonial law were now diſſolved. In this ſenſe alſo it ſeems to be underſtocd in the prophecy of Iſaiah, † *He that walketh righteouſly, and ſpeaketh uprightly, he ſhall dwell on high.*

In this reſtricted ſenſe, a man's uprightneſs ſignifies, that the appearance and profeſſions, which he makes before the world, are agreeable to the deſigns and diſpoſitions of his heart; and that he aſſumes no cha-

* Gal. ii. 14. † Iſaiah xxxiii. 15.

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racter in the eyes of men, but ſuch as he is conſcious of, within himſelf; purſuing no intereſt or project, which he would either be afraid or aſhamed to diſcover to the world, he has therefore no occaſion for the arts of falſehood and deceit. If, among the various accidents of life, the arts of falſehood ſhould, at any time, appear to be ſubſervient to his innocent and laudable deſigns, the native candour of his heart will prompt him inſtantly, and without deliberation, to reject them; for this is the eſtabliſhed and leading maxim of his life, that the conſciouſneſs of inward honour and integrity, is a poſſeſſion infinitely better than all the outward intereſts and honours of the world. * *He walketh righteouſly, and ſpeaketh uprightly; he deſpiſeth the gain of oppreſſions; he ſhaketh his hands from holding of bribes; he ſtoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and ſhutteth his eyes from ſeeing evil.*

* Iſaiah xxxiii. 15.

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This uprightneſs and ſincerity is an eſſential branch of every good man's character, without which, all pretenſions to religion are vain, nay, odious and deteſtable. The uprightneſs, however, of which the prophet ſpeaks in the paſſage now before us, is of a more extenſive nature, and has a much more extenſive influence in the life of man. It ſignifies, not only, that a man is ſincere in his tranſactions with his fellow-men, but that he acts with the ſame ſincerity and candour with himſelf. That he calmly liſtens to the dictates of his conſcience, and immediately ſubmits to their deciſion and authority, in every inſtance of his conduct, and againſt every intereſt, prejudice, or paſſion, by which they are oppoſed. That he is as unwilling to deceive himſelf in the performance of his duty, by the artifice of ſinful prejudice or paſſion, as the man above-deſcribed is unwilling to deceive the world, in order to promote his worldly intereſts and deſigns.

To

To ſet the ſubject in its full light, it ought to be obſerved, that although a man ſhould have no deliberate intention to impoſe upon the world, he may, nevertheleſs, impoſe upon himſelf; he may darken the evidence of truth, and pervert the dictates of his conſcience, by a ſecret management and practice on himſelf; when he is not fully conſcious of his doing ſo, or has not the integrity and ſtrength of mind ſufficient for expoſing the deceit. In all caſes where our intereſt, our prejudice, or paſſions come in competition with our duty, (and ſuch caſes frequently occur) men, who have not learned the uprightneſs mentioned in the text, are apt to darken and deceive themſelves, and to ſhift about for ſome apology or plea, whereby they may be able to reconcile their duty and their intereſt together. Few, it is to be hoped, are ſo completely hardened and inſenſible, as to practiſe what is obviouſly unjuſt, without attempting to conceal the injuſtice from themſelves,

themſelves, by ſome ſpecious colour and diſguiſe. Even Pilate, how corrupted ſoever and depraved, was forced to have recourſe to a little ſuperſtitious artifice, in order to ſilence the remonſtrance of his conſcience, ere he would conſent to the condemnation of our Saviour, after he had declared his judgment of his innocence. * *He took water, and waſhed his hands before the multitude, ſaying, I am innocent of the blood of this juſt perſon; ſee ye to it.*

Herein, indeed, the chief artifice and ſtrength of human wickedneſs conſiſts. Men are forced to give the ſecret approbation of their hearts to what is innocent and laudable; they wiſh to have the reputation of uprightneſs with themſelves, and to be able, in their own reflections, to pronounce themſelves upright and honeſt men. Therefore, when they have not that determined and entire integrity, by which they ought, at once, to part with every intereſt, and

* Mat. xxvii. 24.

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vanquiſh every prejudice and paſſion, that ſtands in oppoſition to the practice of their duty; they have recourſe to a ſecret management and influence upon themſelves, in order to make their innocence and intereſt conſiſtent with each other; and in this ſecret management, the mind exerts a wonderful dexterity, and has a wonderful influence upon itſelf.

Many ſpecious apologies are ſought, and pleaded with ſucceſs. The peculiar neceſſity of the preſent caſe, the examples and eſtabliſhed cuſtom of the world, the ſtrong tendencies and inclinations that are planted in our nature, the uſeful purpoſes that may be ſerved by receding ſomewhat from the rigour of our duty in the preſent caſe, with a ſuperiour zeal to atone for this, in other branches of our duty; theſe and the like apologies are artfully employed: by their aſſiſtance men impoſe upon themſelves, and ſeduce their conſciences into a diſhoneſt approbation of their guilty conduct.

Our

Our Saviour hath placed the corruption of the human heart in this diſhoneſt artifice, and deſcribes it as the ground upon which the condemnation of the wicked will proceed at the final judgment of the world. † *This is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* Theſe obſervations were directed by our Saviour againſt thoſe ſinful prejudices, by which the Jews excluded from their view the clear convincing evidence he had given of the truth of his divine commiſſion. They, at the ſame time, repreſent the diſhoneſt artifice by which a ſinner impoſes on himſelf, and conceals from his own view, the guilt and evil of the ſin he is determined to commit: and the ſenſe of our Saviour's obſervations amounts to this; he who de-

† John iii. 19.

liberately

liberately doeth what is wrong, and is determined to continue in the practice of it, is unwilling to admit of a clear diſcernment of religious truth, leſt he ſhould be forced to ſee the guilt and evil of his conduct, and to ſuffer thereby the reproach and condemnation of his own mind. He therefore *loveth darkneſs rather than light*; i. e. he chuſes to live in ignorance of the real evil and iniquity of what he does, or to hide its deformity in darkneſs.

In oppoſition to this internal falſehood and injuſtice, the juſt man, whoſe path is uprightneſs, carefully preſerves himſelf from the influence of every intereſt, prejudice or paſſion, by which the evidence of truth is darkened, and the force of moral and religious obligations are evaded in the conſciences of men. He hath ſuch a powerful and predominant regard to what is juſt, and ſuch a determined reſolution to adhere to every conſequence, to which it may conduct him in the progreſs of his

life, that depending upon God, *who hath pleaſure in uprightneſs*; he employs his utmoſt care to diſcover every artifice, or falſe ſuggeſtion that would appear in the defence, or offer an apology for what is wrong. He liſtens therefore with a calm attention, to the reaſon and the equity of every caſe that comes before him. In thoſe caſes, more eſpecially, where his own particular intereſts or paſſions are concerned; knowing the deceitfulneſs and bias of the human heart, he is diffident and jealous of himſelf; he makes juſt allowances for this deceitfulneſs, chuſing rather to approach to the extreme of diſintereſtedneſs and candour, than to tranſgreſs the ſacred boundaries of truth and juſtice. For this is the eſtabliſhed maxim of his life, he who doeth evil to another, on whatever temptation or pretence, always does the greateſt evil and injuſtice to himſelf. He is therefore willing to forfeit any other intereſt, rather than de-

part from his integrity. With Job † he is determined, that *his righteouſneſs he will hold faſt, and that his heart ſhall not reproach him ſo long as he ſhall live.* The gains of avarice, the preferments of ambition, the blandiſhments of pleaſure, the intereſts or the ſpirit of a party, the ſolicitations of reſentment, or of his better diſpoſitions of friendſhip and humanity, even the bias of religious zeal, cannot reconcile his heart to what is falſe, or vanquiſh his determined reſolution to adhere to what is true and right in every circumſtance of life. Our Saviour, in the paſſage formerly produced, confirms the truth of this account of the nature of uprightneſs. After he hath obſerved, that *every one who doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved*; he immediately adds §, but *he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifeſt that they are wrought in God*, i. e. he who

† Job xxvii. 6. § John iii. 21.

regu-

regulates his life by the guidance of religious and ſacred truth, and is determined to ſubmit to its deciſion and authority, has his mind always open to its evidence, and is ready to receive every information which is given him of his duty; that he may have the ſatisfaction to perceive, that the conduct of his life is according to the will of God.

From the account which has been given of the nature of uprightneſs, it will eaſily appear that it does not ſignify one particular virtue, but the general principle and ſpring of every virtue in the human heart, and leads the man who is poſſeſſed of it to an impartial regard to every known or diſcoverable inſtance of his duty.—It may farther appear, that the man whoſe path is uprightneſs, will not only ſtudy to avoid thoſe palpable and groſs inſtances of wrong which are generally condemned, and for which his own heart would immediately condemn him; but to act, to the utmoſt of

his power, the beſt and worthieſt part, in every circumſtance of life. He will readily perceive and feel the force of thoſe more delicate and finer obligations which are ſuggeſted by the principles of piety and virtue, when viewed in the whole of their extent. Therefore *whatſoever things are true, or honeſt, or juſt, or pure, or lovely, or of good report*, he will think on theſe, and obſerve them in the conduct of his life. On theſe accounts, the whole extent of moral and religious virtue, is in ſcripture, reſolved into uprightneſs; and the righteous man to whom the promiſes of God are made, is called the man, who lives or walks uprightly.

Having thus given a general deſcription of the nature of uprightneſs, we may add the following remarks, which will enable us ſtill more clearly to perceive its influence, and thereby to form the more juſt and proper judgment of ourſelves.

1ſt

1ſt Remark. That the principle of uprightneſs, as above deſcribed, may prevail in different degrees, even among thoſe who, with ſome propriety, may be ſaid to *walk uprightly*. In the preceding account, the uprightneſs of the juſt has been deſcribed in its natural and genuine perfection, and as it was originally implanted in the heart of man, *For God made man upright*. There is no man however ſince our fall from that uprightneſs in which we were created, in whom its influence invariably prevails. Who can ſay that in every purpoſe and tranſaction of his life, he has been directed only by the love of truth and right, and hath excluded every oppoſite corrupting influence from his heart? Hence it follows that the characters of the juſt whoſe paths are uprightneſs, may admit of ſome variety, and that the principle of uprightneſs may prevail and take poſſeſſion of the heart of man in different degrees.

Nevertheleſs, that a man may be entitled to the denomination of upright, with any

tolerable meaſure of propriety, this, at leaſt, is requiſite; that a regard for what is juſt and right be the predominant and ruling principle of his life; that he conſiders the maintenance of his integrity as his higheſt happineſs and honour, and every deviation from it, as his chief diſhonour and unhappineſs; that in conſequence of this, he be fixed in his integrity, not only againſt thoſe temptations to iniquity which are obvious and palpable, but that he makes it, moreover, the prevailing ſtudy of his life, to obtain a more full diſcernment of his duty, in the whole of its extent, and a more entire ſuperiority over every bias and corruption in the heart, by which it is oppoſed: and would therefore deem it the moſt glorious circumſtance of his life, to be able to recover that complete integrity in which he was created. His path, in this view of it, *is as the morning light, that ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

2. That

2d. That the proof of a man's uprightneſs, is to be taken chiefly from his conduct in thoſe circumſtances of his life wherein his intereſt or paſſions happen to interfere with the practice of his duty. When ſuch an interference does not occur, there is ſcarce any man ſo totally depraved, as not to ſee and chuſe the honeſt part. That ſenſe of equity and right which God originally put into the heart of man, when it meets with nothing to oppoſe its influence, is ſufficient to direct and to determine him. But the trial and proof of a man's uprightneſs lies in this; that he can preſerve the ſame unbiaſſed and impartial diſcernment of his duty, in caſes where his own intereſts or inclinations are to be oppoſed.

It is here indeed that the want or weakneſs of a man's integrity uſually betrays itſelf. By the original conſtruction of the human heart, virtue and uprightneſs is ſecretly approved; every man wiſhes to cloath himſelf with the appearance of it in

his own imagination; nor can a man knowingly depart from it, without ſuffering the reproach and condemnation of his own heart. Unwilling to incur this painful condemnation, and equally unwilling to reſiſt the ſolicitation of his intereſt and paſſions, the diſhoneſt man ſtrives to reconcile theſe oppoſite pretenſions. If a man's integrity was perfect, he would immediately reject the ſiniſter artifice, and preſerve himſelf as open to the evidence of truth and right, in caſes where his intereſts or paſſions are concerned, as in thoſe wherein he has no concern; and it is only in proportion to the vigour and ſucceſs of his endeavours to preſerve himſelf in this impartial ſtate of mind, that he approaches to the ſtate of perfect virtue and uprightneſs.

3d. That in all thoſe caſes where a perſon's intereſt or inclinations ſtand in competition with the practice of his duty, the juſt man ought to put himſelf upon his guard,

guard, and be jealous of himſelf. Without this, the ſelfiſhneſs and vanity natural to the mind of man and the artifice of ſinful paſſions will undoubtedly deſtroy the uprightneſs of the heart, even when the man himſelf is not apprized of it. In theſe caſes a man becomes a party in the cauſe which is to be determined by him; and every one knows how difficult it is to be a fair and equitable judge in ſuch a ſituation. He then who would invariably preſerve the uprightneſs of his heart, muſt, in caſes of this kind, act with a peculiar vigilance and caution. He muſt admit of no determination which is doubtful and ſuſpicious, or the equity of which he does not ſee, but by the help of ſome laboured explication or apology. The path of the juſt lies obviouſly and ſtrait before him, requiring no ſubtilty or art in order to perceive it, or to approve of it when it is perceived; but the need of explication and apology is the mark of falſehood and deceit.

ceit. Thoſe deciſions, which proceed from the uprightneſs of the heart, are clear and ſtrong; they give immediate ſatisfaction, and ſtand in no need of being juſtified by any ſubſequent reflection. But thoſe deciſions, which proceed from the bias of a diſhoneſt heart, are accompanied with darkneſs, confuſion, and perplexity: they muſt be coloured and diſguiſed by ſome ſpecious apology, ere the conſcience can approve of them. There is, as the prophet hath expreſſed it, * *an high-way, it ſhall be called the way of holineſs; the wayfaring men, though fools, ſhall not err therein.*

4th. That in all ſuch competitions as have been mentioned, the uprightneſs of the juſt man is in danger, principally from the better diſpoſitions of his heart; ſuch as kind affection to his relatives and friends; attachment to the intereſt and honour of party, apprehended to be on the ſide of juſtice; zeal for what he takes to be the

* Iſ. xxxv. 8.

honour,

honour, or the cauſe of God. Theſe, and the like diſpoſitions, are uſually ſtrongeſt in perſons of the beſt diſpoſed natures. By their virtuous appearance, they readily obtain the approbation of the conſcious mind; and, therefore, under their protection and diſguiſe, and in order to comply with their demands, a departure from integrity more eaſily conceals itſelf, and aſſumes the form of innocence and juſtice. The juſt man is not ſo much in danger from the coarſer appetites and inclinations of his nature, or the ſordid views of intereſt. He readily perceives, and is ſoon offended with their obvious oppoſition to the dictates of integrity. But the kind affections of his heart are of ſuch an amiable nature, and ſo intimately connected with the principles of virtue, that an honeſt man, by their inſinuating influence, is more eaſily ſeduced from his integrity. Thus the affectionate and tender parent, the generous and faithful friend, the patriot, warmly

warmly intereſted in the welfare of his country; enticed by the amiable appearance of theſe ſocial attachments of his heart, is more eaſily ſeduced from the path which is uprightneſs, with a view to gratify their dictates and demands. Here, therefore, ſhould the juſt man keep his heart with a peculiar care; for no intereſt, or attachment whatſoever, can juſtify a departure from the *path, which is uprightneſs.* Hence that fine expoſtulation in the book of Job*. *Will you ſpeak wickedly for God, will you talk deceitfully for him? will you accept his perſon; will you contend for God?*

5th. That the ſecret artifice and management, by which a man impoſes on himſelf, when he departs from the path which is uprightneſs, after it has been practiſed with ſucceſs, for a conſiderable time, will become the natural temper of the ſoul, and thus proceed without the ſmalleſt oppoſition or remorſe. Conſcience, and the ſenſe

* Job xiii. 7.

of

of moral obligation, may, by long reſiſtance, become, at length, ſo feeble and inactive, as to give but little or no diſturbance in the commiſſion of what is wrong; ſo that thoſe diſhoneſt arts, by which their authority is oppoſed, may entirely eſcape the obſervation of the man himſelf, by whom they are employed: nay, he may believe himſelf to be perfectly ſincere, at the very time he is unhappily ſeduced and corrupted by their influence. Hence we ſee perſons living in the full perſuaſion of their own integrity, and exclaiming zealouſly againſt the injuſtice of the world, whilſt they themſelves are notoriouſly chargeable with thoſe inſtances of guilt againſt which they have exclaimed. This ſpecies of ſelf-deceit was remarkably exemplified in the behaviour of King David, in the matter of Uriah, and the judgment which he pronounced againſt it, when deſcribed by the prophet Nathan *.

* 2 Sam. vi. 12.

6th.

6th. The artifice by which a man deceives himſelf, when he departs from his uprightneſs, may be, and ſometimes is, employed againſt the whole ſcheme of moral and religious obligation. This becomes the caſe, when men have totally abandoned all regard for God, have totally ſilenced the dictates of their conſcience, and reſigned themſelves, without reſtraint, to the influence of their irregular and ſinful paſſions. With ſuch perſons it becomes the ſtudied labour of their lives, to deſtroy the evidence of every moral and religious truth, or to render it ſo uncertain and obſcure, as to leave no ſufficient tie upon their conſcience. When men arrive at this degree of artifice, the uprightneſs of their character is totally deſtroyed. In the ſtyle of ſacred ſcripture, * *The light that is in them is darkneſs.* † *They have turned the truth of God into a lie. They call evil good, and good evil; put darkneſs for light, and light for*

* Mat. vi. 23. † Rom. i. 25.

dark-

darkneſs; bitter for ſweet, and ſweet for bitter.

7th. That the uprightneſs of the juſt man will diſpoſe him to attend, not only to the whole extent and compaſs of his duty, as far as it is already known; but, withal, to every mean which Providence affords him, either of enlarging his diſcernment of his duty, or of ſtrengthening his attachment to it.

Firſt, He will attend with candour to the whole extent and compaſs of his duty, as far as it is known; whether it may refer more immediately to God or man. The uprightneſs of his heart, which leads him to a dutiful and virtuous conduct towards men, will, with equal influence, lead him to a devout and reſpectable conduct towards God. He will therefore exerciſe himſelf in this, *To have always a conſcience void of offence toward God, and toward men*; and is reſolved, that, for the neglect or violation of his duty, in either of theſe reſpects,

his

his heart ſhall not reproach him as long as he ſhall live.

From the ſame principle of uprightneſs, he will calmly and candidly attend to every mean, which Providence affords, of enlarging his diſcernment of his duty, or of ſtrengthening his attachment to it. * *He deſpiſes not propheſyings; he proves all things, and holds faſt that which is good.* This attention is eſſential to the uprightneſs of the juſt. In conſequence of this, as ſoon as he perceives that God has ſignified his will to men, by the Chriſtian revelation, he will take it into his ſerious conſideration and regard, and draw from it all the comfort and aſſiſtance in the practice of his duty, which it is deſigned and fitted to afford.

This part of the juſt man's character was remarkably exemplified in the conduct of Nathaniel, to whom our Saviour gave the amiable denomination of *an Iſraelite indeed,*

* 1 Theſ. v. 20.

in

in whom there was no guile. How he merited the character, may be learned from what is related of him in the goſpel: * Philip, the friend and companion of Nathaniel, had lately been convinced, that Jeſus was the Chriſt, and had openly declared himſelf one of his diſciples. Soon after, Philip meeting with Nathaniel, informed him, that he had found the Chriſt. Nathaniel had imbibed the popular and common prejudice, that out of Nazareth no great prophet ſhould ariſe. His anſwer, therefore, to Philip's information, was, *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* To this Philip made the following reply; *Come and ſee*, i. e. inquire into the fact, and determine fairly for yourſelf, whatever may have been your former apprehenſion in this matter. On this reaſonable advice and direction from his friend, the good man, prompted by the native honeſty and goodneſs of his heart, inſtantly ſuſpends all

* John i. 43.

his former prepoſſeſſions on the ſubject; goes along with him to Jeſus, in order to inquire into the truth of what had been reported by his friend: determined, that, in ſpite of every prejudice, he will embrace the truth, and adhere to every conſequence to which it may lead him in the future conduct of his life. When Jeſus obſerved him, coming to him with this candour and honeſty of heart, he gave him the extraordinary character of *an Iſraelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.*

8th. The laſt remark I ſhall offer on the nature of uprightneſs is, That it ſhould be founded on a ſtrong conviction of its native excellence and worth, independent of theſe motives to the practice of it, which are drawn from its effects. This is a circumſtance eſſential to the candour and uprightneſs of the juſt. Till this conviction be eſtabliſhed in his breaſt, it will be difficult, or impoſſible, for him to proceed with ſtedfaſtneſs and uniformity in the path which

which is uprightneſs, amidſt the many ſtrong ſeducements to which he is expoſed. The advantages, which are ſuppoſed to be connected with the practice of uprightneſs, will, in this ſtate of mind, be eaſily overlooked by a proſpect of the oppoſite advantages, which are offered, or pleaded, as the reward of a departure from it; and in this perilous condition, the artifice of ſinful inclinations will readily evade the ſtrongeſt ties of truth and virtue.

But when the juſt man is ſtruck with a love of virtue and uprightneſs, on the view of its own inherent excellence; when he adheres to the dictates of it, as the higheſt happineſs and honour of his life; and deteſts every inſtance of iniquity, as the higheſt diſhonour and unhappineſs; he will immediately, and eaſily, reſiſt every artifice, or temptation, by which it is oppoſed. This principle, withal, will give a delicacy to the moral feelings of his heart, whereby he will eaſily detect the

firſt approaches of that inward artifice, which darkens and perverts the conſciences of men; and will give a ſtrength of reſolution to reject them with contempt.

At the ſame time it ought to be obeſerved, that in our preſent ſtate of imperfection, in which we are expoſed to ſo many temptations to depart from our integrity, it is of the higheſt importance to preſerve a firm dependance upon God, as always intereſted in the happineſs of them who are upright; and, in conſequence of this, a firm perſuaſion, that the juſt man ſhall never be a loſer by his virtue and uprightneſs, in the whole of his exiſtence; but that every ſacrifice of intereſt, which he makes by his adherence to it, ſhall be abundantly rewarded by *Him who weigheth the path of the juſt.* Hence, in order to ſupport the uprightneſs of the juſt, the moſt ample promiſes are made in ſcripture, to them who live uprightly: * *The Lord is*

* Pſ. lxxxiv. 11.

a ſun,

a ſun, and ſhield; He will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. * *He that walketh righteouſly, and ſpeaketh uprightly—he ſhall dwell on high, his place of defence ſhall be the munitions of rocks, bread ſhall be given him, his waters ſhall be ſure.* In order then to fix the juſt man immoveably in the path which is uprightneſs, each of theſe principles muſt give their influence and ſupport. Firſt, the love of virtue and uprightneſs, on account of its inherent excellence and worth; and, ſecondly, a firm perſuaſion, that it ſtands connected by the Providence and promiſes of God, with our higheſt happineſs and welfare.

From all that hath been ſaid, it may appear, that it much concerns us all to underſtand the nature of uprightneſs in its full extent. The character of the upright man is claimed by every one; and, probably, the man is ſcarcely to be found, who

* Iſ. xxxiii. 15.

does

does not pleaſe himſelf with the perſuaſion of his own uprightneſs: ſuch is its importance to the happineſs of life! we ought therefore to put ourſelves upon our guard, leſt we miſtake its real nature, and ſatisfy ourſelves with a falſe, or partial view of it. Some degree of uprightneſs is, indeed, requiſite to our living in ſociety with any tolerable meaſure of eſteem. But this degree of it may be preſerved; and with *this* a man may ſatisfy himſelf, whilſt, at the ſame time, he is far from that impartial and uniform uprightneſs, which alone can be approved by him, *who weigheth the path of the juſt, and whoſe countenance beholdeth the upright.*

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